

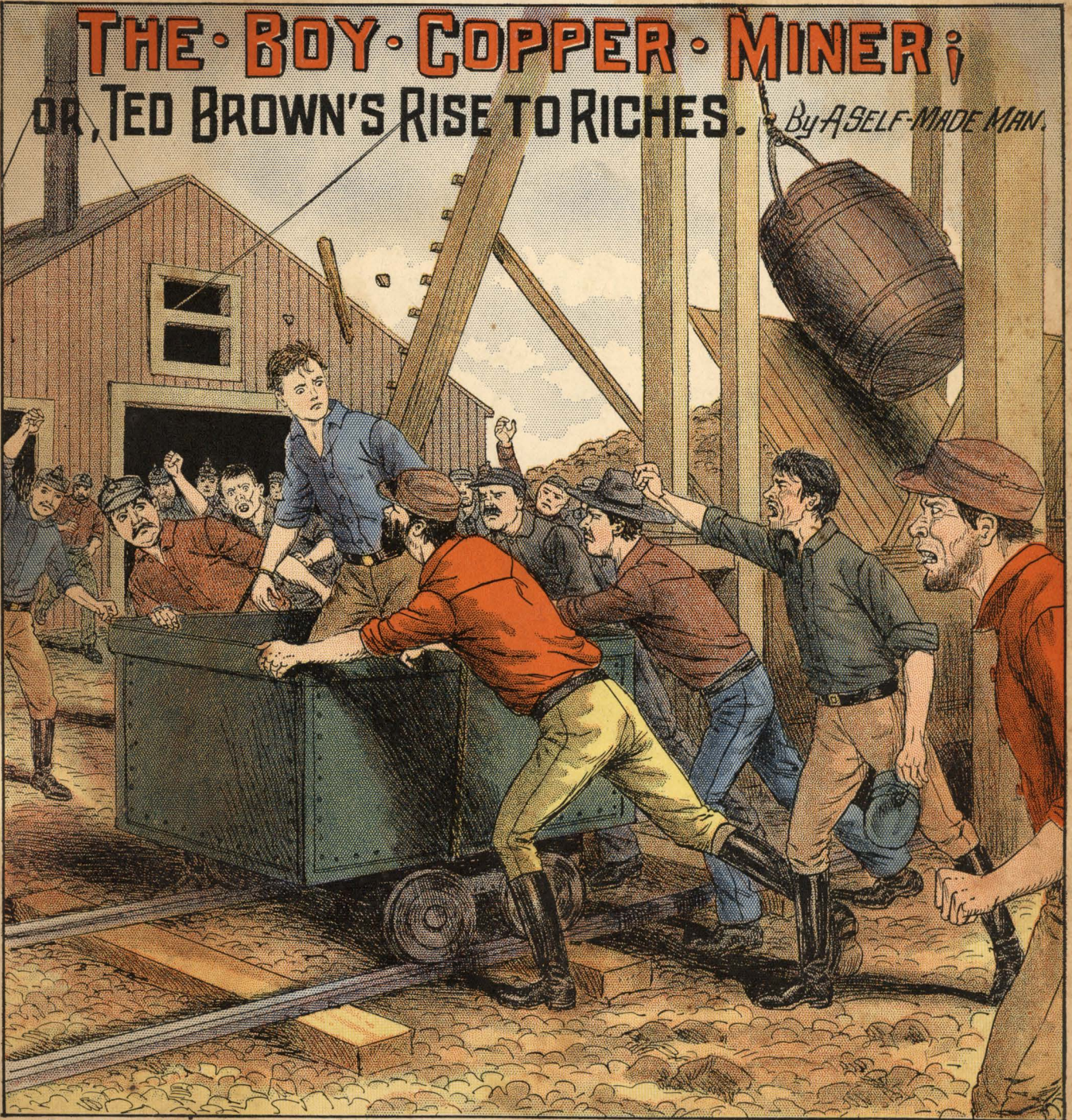
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FAME & FORTUNE WEEKLY

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

THE BOY COPPER MINER;
OR, TED BROWN'S RISE TO RICHES. *By A SELF-MADE MAN.*



In spite of his resistance Ted Brown was lifted into the car and tied there. Then the angry copper miners proceeded to push the car away from the mouth of the shaft toward the incline leading to the river.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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THE BOY COPPER MINER

OR,

TED BROWN'S RISE TO RICHES

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

THE BULLY OF THE MINE.

"Gee! But I'm glad work is over for the day. I'm about fagged out."

Thus spoke Ted Brown, a sturdy, good-looking boy, with a deeply tanned countenance, as a shrill whistle resounded through the narrow, rugged tunnel, deep down in the ground, where a group of copper miners, each with a small lamp in the front of his hat and a pickaxe or shovel in his hand, were following up the operations of a power drill that was boring a way further and further from the perpendicular main shaft which led up two hundred feet or more to the surface of the earth.

Ted had been working in the Lookout copper mine near Carson, Montana, for about three months, and in that short time he had learned what it was to hustle for a living.

He had been born and brought up on a small farm in Petersville, Iowa, and knew what it was to labor by the sweat of his brow during the busy season; but hard as he had found farm work it was to a certain extent child's play beside copper mining in the dark and noisome regions under ground.

He had come West four months before to look up a piece of property in the vicinity of Carson which had been left him by his late uncle, Hiram Brown.

As he was under age his mother held it in trust for him.

Soon after the property had come to him Ted read in the papers about the new discoveries of copper ore in Montana.

Learning that there were copper mines in operation in the neighborhood of his property he began to figure that there might be copper on his ground as well.

If there was he felt that he was in line to become a rich boy.

The more he thought the matter over the more eager he became to investigate the question for himself.

Not without difficulty he persuaded his mother to let him go West in order to satisfy his curiosity.

He brought a copy of the deed and the official survey of his property with him, and after reaching Carson he found no trouble in locating his land, which had been duly recorded in his name a short time before.

He spent a couple of weeks making inquiries among the denizens of the wild and woolly district around Carson, but nobody could throw any light on the character of his ground beneath the surface.

So far as its upper crust went, he could see that for himself.

In extent it measured several acres, was more or less uneven, having a decided elevation at one point, and was sparsely wooded.

A deep creek, that some people would have called a small river, formed its eastern boundary, and ran southward for a mile, when it emptied into one of Montana's numerous big streams.

Ted found that the ground would have to be thoroughly prospected by an expert before any reliable opinion could be passed on the copper question.

This would cost money, and Ted had no money to spend on such an investigation.

Having reached the end of his tether, most boys would have turned around and gone back home.

Ted, however, was different from most boys.

He was a lad of grit and determination.

Having got the idea into his crop that there was copper on his property, he determined to remain West and push the matter to a finish.

Not being overburdened with cash, it was necessary for him to get a job in order for him to pay his way.

He had the choice between going into a store in Carson or tackling copper mining.

He chose the latter because, though the work was infinitely harder, he would gain a whole lot of practical experience in a line he was deeply interested in.

So he applied for work at the Lookout mine and was employed.

After making the remark with which this chapter opens, Ted slung his shovel over his shoulder and turned his dirt-begrimed face toward the main shaft, where a stout wooden cage attached to a wire cable was waiting to carry the day shift in sections to the surface above.

"Hello, Ted; glad you're alive?" asked a boy of about his own age who had been working in the same tunnel, and was waiting to accompany him to the main shaft.

"That's about all I am, Jesse," replied Ted, as they started along together.

Ted and Jesse Dane had become sworn friends since the first few days of the former's employment in the mine.

Jesse was an orphan, the son of a miner who had lost his life in the Lookout mine a year since.

He had worked long enough underground to be quite experienced at the business, and his advice and assistance proved of great value to Ted during his first weeks on the job.

"Tired, eh?" grinned Jesse.

"I should say I am! It's been a hard day."

"I don't see that there's much difference between one day and another. They're all hard enough. The copper we dig out by the sweat of our brows makes some fortunate people richer even while they're living on the fat of the land and enjoying themselves. Sunday is the only time we have for rest and recreation, and there isn't a whole lot of pleasure to be found in this neighborhood."

"That's right, there isn't. Well, maybe some day I'll be rich myself."

"You're always thinking about that land of yours."

"Why not? You agree with me that there may be copper in the ground. The whole region around here is said to be more or less affected by the veins of ore."

"I've advised you to talk with the superintendent on the subject. He might interest the owners of this mine so far that they might be induced to have your ground prospected. If it showed outcroppings of the ore they'd buy it from you at a good price."

"Of course they'd buy it if they had some evidence of the presence of copper ore on it; but they wouldn't give anything near what it was worth in that case. It might prove to be a valuable copper mine, worth a million or more, but I'd come in for a mighty small share of its real value. These copper barons are out for everything in sight, and as they have the coin behind them they have a bulge on the situation."

"That isn't any lie, I'll admit," replied Jesse, as they walked up to a crowd of men awaiting their turn to be lifted up the shaft.

The cage came down and a rush was made to get into it.

Jesse sprang in and Ted was following, and had got one leg over the side, when a big, surly-looking miner named Tug Ralston grabbed him by the shoulder, pulled him forcibly back, and coolly took his place.

Those in the cage regarded this wanton act with evident disapproval.

It was might against right, and not according to their code of honor.

"What did you do that for, Tug Ralston?" demanded Ted indignantly.

"Because it suited me," grunted the stalwart miner.

"You wouldn't do it to one of your size, you big bully," cried Ted, who was hot under the collar over the act.

"Don't you give me none of your sass, young feller, or I'll wring your neck," answered Ralston menacingly.

"You won't wring my neck—not if I know it," replied Ted pluckily.

"Won't I?" snarled the man.

He hauled back and deliberately struck Ted in the face with the palm of his horny hand.

Ted staggered back from the force of the blow, then as the signal was given to hoist away he rushed forward and smashed Ralston a blow in the eye with the full force of his fist, and Ted's fist was not a soft one, either.

The man uttered an imprecation and made a spring to reach the boy.

Ted eluded his grasp, though he reached far over the side of the cage.

At that moment the cage started with a jerk, Ralston lost his balance and fell out head first, taking a drop of a dozen feet.

The ground was much harder than his cranium, and so the shock deprived him of consciousness.

Neither Ted nor the men who were yet to go up felt much sympathy for the bully.

He was not generally liked, except possibly by two or three cronies who associated with him, and who found it to their interest to stand in with him.

The incident was regarded as rather serious by the men, who knew the implacable side of the ruffian's character.

"I'm afraid you've put your foot in it, my lad," said a brawny miner. "You'll find that you've made an enemy of Ralston, and he's a bad man to be up against."

"I don't care," replied Ted. "I won't let him or anybody else sit on my neck."

"You're a plucky chap," said the miner, favoring Ted with an admiring look. "We all agree that Ralston had no right to pull you out of the cage, but that won't mend matters. Tug is accustomed to do pretty much as he pleases, for nobody cares to quarrel with him. He's known to be quarrelsome and vindictive when opposed. Let me advise you to steer clear of him, and at the same time be on your guard. He'd just as soon strike you behind your back as not, even if you're only a boy. If the matter is reported to the superintendent I wouldn't be surprised if Ralston was discharged. I've heard that the super has only been waiting for an excuse to get rid of him ever since he sent one of the men to the doctor with a fractured skull from a

blow with his shovel. He claimed it was an accident, but there are reasons for believing it was done deliberately. However, as the man died and the case couldn't be proved against him nothing was done; but he's regarded as an eye-sore at the mine."

No one tried to bring Ralston to his senses.

He was propped up against one of the tunnel walls and allowed to remain there till the cage came down again, when he was lifted into it.

"Get in, my lad," said the miner.

Ted got in, the rest followed and they were soon brought up to the mouth of the shaft.

CHAPTER II.

A RUN-IN WITH TUG RALSTON ON THE STREET.

Jesse Dane was waiting near the mouth of the shaft for Ted to come up.

He and Ted roomed together in the same house on the suburb of Carson about half a mile from the mine.

A dozen of the single men boarded there also.

The place was called the "Miners' Rest," and the front room on the ground floor was fitted up as a saloon.

The dining-room was just behind, with the kitchen in the rear.

The rudely furnished sleeping-rooms were on the two floors above.

"Is he dead?" asked Jesse, observing the ghastly look on Tug Ralston's face as the fellow was lifted from the cage and borne to one of the sheds close by.

"No such luck," growled one of the miners, who privately detested the bully. "The roof of the mine would have to fall on him to give him his quietus."

"You had a great nerve to hit him the way you did," said Jesse to Ted. "He'll be down on you after this like a thousand of brick."

"I can't help that," replied Ted. "He struck me a cowardly blow and I gave him back as good."

"He'll get square with you some way, I'm afraid," said Jesse, shaking his head.

"I'll watch out that he doesn't."

"You'll have to keep your eyes skinned all the time."

"I mean to. I know what he is."

"He killed a man in the mine seven months ago."

"So I heard. Fractured his skull with his shovel."

"He said it was done by accident, but the men think differently."

"He ought to have been discharged on general principles, for he carries things with a pretty high hand."

"I guess the super doesn't care to have a run-in with him."

"The men seem a bit afraid of him."

"They are. They don't care to make an enemy of him."

"I suppose I have."

"There isn't much doubt about that."

"He's the biggest man in the mine. Only a coward and a cur of his size would try to get back at a boy like me."

"That's what he is."

"If he tackles me I'll do my best to defend myself."

"You won't stand much chance if he goes for you."

"I wish I had a gun. I'd be justified in using it against him."

"If I were you I'd buy a small revolver in Carson to-night. If he attacked you and you shot him nothing would be done to you."

"I'd be put in jail and would have to prove that I did it in self-defense."

"I guess you could prove that easily enough. His size and reputation would be in your favor."

"I don't like the idea of being obliged to shoot even such a brute as Tug Ralston."

"Better that than be killed yourself."

"Would he dare go as far as that? It would go pretty hard with him I think if he did me up."

"I guess it would, but that wouldn't do you any good. It's best to be on the safe side."

"I don't intend to let the matter worry me, at any rate. He doesn't work in our tunnel, so I don't think he'll be able to take any advantage of me below. The men wouldn't let him attack me openly."

"He'll lay for you above ground."

"I won't let him get near me if I can help it."

"I'll stand by you. We'll go about together as we usually do, anyway. He'll have to tackle both of us if he wants to reach you."

"Thanks, Jesse. I know you'll do what you can for me."

"Bet your life I will."

They had now reached their boarding-house, so they hurried in to wash up and then go to supper.

The long table was crowded, but their places were waiting for them.

Two rosy-cheeked young women acted as waitresses.

Ted was a favorite with both of them, but Maggie Moss, the smaller of the two, regarded him as her especial property, for she always waited on the boys.

"Hello, Maggie; how's things?" said Ted, as he took his seat.

"Lovely," she replied with a smile.

"So are you," grinned Ted.

"No compliments, please. There's oxtail and vegetable soup to-night—which will you have?"

"Give me the oxtail."

Jesse said he'd have the same, and the girl presently brought two platesful.

"Roast beef or boiled mutton with capers?" asked the girl.

"Mutton for me," answered Ted, and again Jesse said the same for him.

Coffee followed and the meal wound up with rice pudding full of raisins.

The boys ate heartily and left the table feeling good.

They got their hats and took a stroll into Carson.

There were a couple of dance halls in the town, and a vaudeville show which commenced at eight o'clock.

Of plain saloons there were a-plenty, and all were well patronized after dark.

There was a Methodist church and a Catholic chapel.

An entertainment, a quarter admission, had been announced to take place that evening in the basement of the former.

It consisted of moving pictures descriptive of Oriental lands, interspersed with music furnished by a phonograph.

Ted and Jesse decided to take it in.

The show proved to be well worth the money, and the boys enjoyed it very much indeed.

It was over at ten o'clock.

When they came out of the church and walked back toward their boarding-house they found the saloons on their way in full blast.

As they passed one of them Tug Ralston, with his head bound up, came out with two of his cronies.

He was pretty well loaded, but not so drunk but he recognized Ted.

With a howl of concentrated rage he made a spring for the boy.

He would have caught Ted, who did not notice him in time, but for Jesse.

Young Dane dropped in front of Ralston and the ruffian fell over him just as his fingers clutched Ted by the shoulder.

Tug rolled into the gutter, swearing furiously.

Scrambling to his feet he drew a revolver from his hip pocket and aimed it at Jesse as the boy was getting up.

Ted, seeing his friend's peril, sprang forward and struck up the drunken rascal's arm just as the revolver exploded.

The ball went through the rim of the hat of one of his cronies, and then smashed a pane in the saloon window.

Ted grabbed his wrist to prevent him using the weapon again.

Jesse piled in to help Ted.

A crowd of excited men poured out of the saloon.

Ralston, with a powerful swing, flung both boys from him, and fired at Ted, missing his head by the fraction of an inch.

Before he could repeat the performance half a dozen men flung themselves upon the ruffian, tripped him up and pinned him to the ground.

The revolver was taken from him, and one of the town officers coming up he was carried raving like a madman to the lock-up, but it took four men in addition to the officer to land him there.

Next morning he got thirty days' confinement and a fine from the magistrate.

In addition he was discharged from the mine, to the great satisfaction of the two boys, as well as the miners in general.

CHAPTER III.

SAVED IN THE NICK OF TIME.

During the thirty days that Tug Ralston was confined in jail, Ted and Jesse each Sunday visited the Brown property and prospected it on their own hook.

They were looking for outcroppings of copper ore.

Jesse was fairly familiar with the methods of prospectors, and he possessed a general knowledge of the signs indicating the presence of the metal.

He also was able to pick out the most likely spots where ore would be found, if at all.

They had borrowed a prospector's outfit of hammers and other tools, and employed them in their expeditions.

For three Sundays their search was unsuccessful, but on the fourth, while prying into a break on the hillside, Jesse found undoubted signs of ore in the ground.

"There's a vein of ore in this hill or I don't know what

I'm talking about," said Dane, after critically examining several specimens he had knocked into sections.

"Are you sure of that?" asked Ted excitedly.

"Sure as we stand here."

"Then I'll be right in it."

"Yes, that's a fact, and I wish I was right in it, too."

"So you shall be, Jesse," cried Ted impulsively. "Whatever I make out of this property above its ordinary appraised value you shall have a share of. You're my friend and comrade, and as such you shall be a gainer by any prosperity that comes to me."

"Do you mean that, Ted?" asked Jesse, with sparkling eyes.

"I do. You don't think I'd be so mean as to go back on you."

"No, but still I haven't any right to expect to gain anything out of your land."

"Why, aren't you prospecting it for me?"

"I'm doing the best I can in that direction."

"Of course you are. It would be a good while before I could be competent to do the thing myself. You have also taken an interest in my affairs, and have encouraged me right along when older people have practically turned me down on the question of copper. If we find a copper mine on this ground I'll see that you come in for a square deal."

Crack!

Zip!

The piece of ore Ted held in his hand flew a yard away.

The first sound was the report of a revolver, and the second the contact of a bullet with the ore.

Both boys cast a startled glance in the direction of the report.

They saw a little curl of smoke rising from the far end of the cleft in the hill where they were standing.

In another moment a face appeared framed in the bushes—the face of Tug Ralston, looking more disreputable than ever.

He had been released from jail that morning and advised to make himself scarce.

He had no intention of making himself scarce until he had revenged himself on the boy who he considered the cause of his recent troubles.

That afternoon he had learned from one of his cronies that the boys had been seen going into the hills with a prospector's outfit, and after borrowing a revolver he started out to trail them.

He intended to kill or seriously maim Ted—he didn't care which.

As for Jesse, though he had no great love for the boy, he entertained no particular plans—circumstances would decide how he would deal with him.

After trudging around for two hours he came upon the boys in the cut.

Then he whipped out his weapon and fired at Ted.

The boys were surprised as well as aghast at the unexpected appearance of the rascal.

They thought him still in jail.

They realized their disadvantage in the presence of this man, for they were unarmed and he had a revolver.

"Tug Ralston!" cried Jesse. "And he's got a gun. What shall we do?"

The case looked rather desperate, for they were out in an unfrequented part of the country, a mile from the Look-out mine.

It was Sunday, too, when few of the miners or others went abroad.

"We're in a fix, I'm afraid," replied Ted.

"A bad fix, for that fellow seems disposed to shoot one or both of us. See him grin. He seems to be aware that we're at his mercy."

"Well, young fellers, I've got you where I want you," said Tug, coming from behind the rock which had concealed him. "That shot was intended to let you know that I was on hand. The next may mean somethin' different. I'm waitin' to see you both get down on your knees and beg me to let you off."

He uttered a disagreeable laugh and advanced toward them, holding his cocked weapon ready for instant use.

"What you doin'? Lookin' for copper? What good would it do you if you found it? Is the owner of this property payin' you to prospect for him?"

He spoke sarcastically.

"Why are you molesting us? Why did you shoot? You might have hit one of us," said Ted, without showing a bit of fear, though he felt that matters were critical.

The rascal laughed grimly at the boy's speech.

"I guessed you didn't know I was out of jail, so I thought I'd surprise you. It's a way I have sometimes when I'm feelin' good," he chuckled.

There was a wicked leer in his eyes which showed that his mirth was assumed.

"Glad to see me, ain't you, both of you? You look it," and the scoundrel laughed again, as though he thought it a good joke.

"What do you want with us?" asked Ted.

"Well, I don't want much with your friend, though he did do me dirt in front of the Mornin' Glory Saloon a month ago; but I think you and me has an account to settle, and I reckon this is about the time and place to settle it."

"Are you thinking of murdering me?" asked Ted, his blood running cold at the bare prospect of such a terrible thing.

"Murderin' you! Haw! haw! haw!" laughed the ruffian, who was playing with his intended victim like a cat does with a mouse. "If I intended doin' that wouldn't I have done it already without wastin' my jaw on you?"

"Then what do you mean to do?"

Ralston looked at him with an air of fiendish triumph.

"You can go," he said, waving his revolver at Jesse.

"Not without Ted," answered Dane.

"Go, I tell you!" roared Tug, menacingly.

Jesse didn't move.

Ralston walked over and struck him a blow with his fist in the forehead which stretched the boy senseless at his feet.

"Coward!" cried Ted, springing on him like a wildcat.

The ruffian turned upon him in a towering rage.

"I'll kill you, you infernal young varmint!" he gritted, dropping his revolver and seizing the boy with both of his sinewy arms.

Ted clung to him like a leech, winding both of his legs around one of Tug's, and getting his head around under his arm.

Ralston clawed at him viciously, more like a wild beast than a man.

For some minutes the desperate struggle continued.

Ted felt that he was fighting for his life, with the chances all against him.

At length the ruffian managed to pull him clear by his tremendous strength.

Then he threw the boy on the ground and put one of his boots on his chest.

"Tackle me, will you, you young catamount! I guess you don't know who you're monkeyin' with."

He glared down at the helpless boy with malignant satisfaction.

Then he removed his foot and picked up his revolver.

"What's to hinder me blowin' your brains out?" said Tug, aiming his gun at Ted's head.

The boy shuddered and closed his eyes.

He fully expected his last hour had come.

Ralston laughed harshly.

His finger was on the trigger, but he didn't pull it.

He enjoyed the pleasure of seeing his intended victim suffer.

He meant to kill him, or perhaps wound him so badly that his death would ultimately ensue, but he was in no hurry about it.

The afternoon was young yet, the neighborhood lonesome and deserted, and he figured that he had things all his own way.

He studied the boy, wondering where he would shoot him first.

Finally he decided that he would frighten him a bit more.

"Now, then, I give you a minute to say your prayers."

Ted opened his eyes and saw the muzzle of the revolver pointed at his head.

"You're a coward! If you kill me you'll swing for your crime."

"I'll take my chances of that. The minute is up. One—two—three!"

He moved the weapon a trifle and pulled the trigger.

A flash—a report—and the ball plowed into the ground so close to the boy's ear that he could almost feel the sting of it.

"Missed you, did I?" grinned the scoundrel, who hadn't intended to hit him. "Next time I'll do better."

"I don't think you will!" said a clear, girlish voice at that moment.

Tug looked up clearly startled and found himself covered by a cocked revolver in the hand of a swarthy-looking maiden of perhaps sixteen.

CHAPTER IV.

TESS COOKE.

Ted lay still and uncertain as to the issue, but his heart thrilled with hope.

He had heard the girlish voice, and there was a determined ring to it that meant business.

The top of his head was toward the newcomer and he couldn't see her.

He could see, however, that her words and attitude had a strong effect on Ralston.

"Drop your gun, pard," spoke the girl again, "and drop

it quick. This gun of mine has a habit of going off sudden-like on occasions, and it never misses. When I see a big chap like you taking advantage of a little fellow it makes me nervous. As my finger is on the trigger, and it's a hair one, something is liable to drop in short order if you make me more nervous than I am."

The girl spoke coolly, but significantly.

Tug saw she had him dead to rights and was not to be trifled with.

With a deep imprecation he let his revolver drop to the ground.

"You're sensible, pard," spoke up the girl. "Now, step back a couple of feet. Don't go too far, for something might happen if you did."

Ralston unwillingly obeyed her mandate, but then he couldn't help himself.

He had been having his fun with Ted, now the visitor was having hers with him.

Turn about is fair play, but it isn't always satisfactory to the person who has the short end of the game.

The moment Tug moved back Ted sprang to his feet and looked at the person who had saved him.

She was an uncommonly pretty girl, with a sylph-like figure, and was dressed in wild Western style, her head covered by a soft cowboy hat.

She had seated herself carelessly on a boulder and held her weapon pointed at Ralston in an easy way that was not comfortable to the rascal.

"I'm much obliged to you, miss, for helping me out," said Ted gratefully. "You saved my life, for the rascal meant to kill me."

"You're welcome, pard," replied the girl, taking the boy in from his head down with a quick, comprehensive glance. "Better pick up that gun. It will be safer in your hands than his."

Ted took possession of Ralston's weapon, and then felt that he feared the man no longer.

"What's happened to him?" asked the girl, indicating Jesse. "Not shot, I hope?"

"No. Tug Ralston struck him down with a blow in the face with his fist."

"Oh! So this fellow's name is Tug Ralston? I've heard my dad tell of him. I ain't surprised at anything he might do."

"He's a cowardly cur," returned Ted. "He ought to consider himself more than a match for Jesse and me without drawing a revolver on us. I wish I was nearly his equal in strength and I'd give him the licking of his life."

The girl noted his words with some admiration.

She saw that Ted was gifted with true grit.

"What is your name, miss?" asked the boy.

"Tess Cooke. What's yours?"

"Ted Brown."

"Work at the mine?"

"Yes."

"What's your pard's name?"

"Jesse Dane."

"What are you doing out here? Prospecting?"

"Yes, miss. This is my property, left me by my uncle. Jesse and I were looking to see if we could find indications of copper on it."

"I suppose that fellow surprised you?"

"He did. He hid behind that rock and fired on us."

"Better try and bring your pard to his senses," said the girl.

Ted agreed with her.

He went to a spring near by and brought the top of his hat full of water, which he threw in Jesse's face.

Then he chafed the boy's temples and he presently revived.

"What happened to me?" asked Dane in a dazed way.

"Who is that?" he added as his eyes rested on the girl.

"That is Miss Cooke."

"Never mind the 'miss,' pard," said the girl. "Call me Tess."

Dane then saw Tug Ralston standing against the side of the pass in sullen impotence.

"I remember everything now," he said. "Ralston struck me down with his fist."

"He won't do it again in a hurry."

"What's happened to him?"

"Tess Cooke has him nailed. See the revolver in her hand? That did the business for Ralston just as he was going to kill me."

"Then he intended to shoot you?"

"He did, but Tess Cooke saved me."

"I've heard of her, but never saw her before."

"She's a dandy from Dandyville. She called him down so hard that he just chucked up the sponge."

"She's a wonder," said Dane, casting a glance of admiration as well as respect at the girl, who seemed to be paying no attention to them, but just keeping the big ruffian under her eye.

"Yes, she's a corker, and a mighty pretty girl, too," said Ted, who was by no means insensible to the girl's unquestioned beauty.

"Well, pard," said Tess Cooke, "what are you going to do with this man? You've got his gun. You might amuse yourself shooting a few holes through him."

She spoke in an easy, careless way, as if such a performance was the most ordinary thing in the world.

"You don't mean that, I guess," replied Ted, regarding her earnestly.

"That's what he was going to do to you when I came up and stopped him," she answered. "It's your lead now. You hold a full flush. He's played his hand and lost. If you let him go he'll pick up a gun somewhere and do you up. Better settle the game while you hold the cards."

Ted wondered if the girl really meant what she said.

He looked at Ralston and saw that the fellow was decidedly uneasy.

He thought he'd test Tug's nerve, though he didn't think the man had much.

"Tug Ralston, you meant to kill me awhile ago. If I let you go you'll try to work the same game over again. I guess I'll have to shoot you to save myself."

He raised the revolver on a level with the ruffian's heart.

"Don't shoot!" gasped the man, his face turning livid. "Let me off and I'll cry quits."

"It won't pay to trust such a chap as you."

"I swear I'll let you alone after this."

"What guarantee have I that you will?"

"I'll give you my word."

"What's that worth?"

"I'll stand by it."

"Get down on your knees and swear you'll not interfere with me in the future."

Tug obeyed, and swore in his own peculiar way that he'd let Ted alone after that.

"Jesse," said Ted. "Take that bandanna out of his pocket and tie his hands behind his back."

Dane did so.

"What are you goin' to do with me?" asked Ralston.

"Take you to town and deliver you over to the sheriff," replied Ted.

The rascal glared at him, but made no reply.

Ted then turned to the girl, who had put up her revolver.

"I hope you understand that I am deeply grateful to you, Miss Cooke, for saving my life," he said.

"I told you that you were welcome, pard," replied the girl with a friendly smile.

"I'd like to shake hands with you, if you don't object."

"I haven't any objection," she replied, rising from the boulder and approaching him.

They shook hands.

"I hope I'll see you again, miss," he said.

"If you want to see me you'll find me over at dad's house, a mile up the creek."

"Jesse and I'll call on you next Sunday afternoon if you'll be home."

"I'll be there if you say you'll come."

"We'll come."

Whether it was that Jesse had made a bungle of his job of tying Ralston, or that owing to his strength the handkerchief failed to hold his wrists, certain it is that Tug freed himself, and, taking advantage of the momentary inattention of the boys, made a sudden break for the end of the cut in the hill.

Jesse gave the alarm, and Ted swung around.

"Stop!" he shouted to the rascal.

The fellow paid no attention to him.

Ted fired at his legs, but the bullet went a trifle wide, and before he could shoot again Ralston had disappeared around the boulder from behind which he had fired his first shot at the boys.

CHAPTER V.

CAUGHT UNAWARES.

Ted rushed after him as fast as he could.

When he reached the boulder he caught sight of the fleeing ruffian some little distance away.

Ted fired at him again and missed as before.

Ralston turned, shook his fist back at him and then plunged into a thick clump of bushes.

Ted then gave up the pursuit and returned to Jesse and the girl.

Tess Cooke explained how she had heard the first shot at a distance and walked over to the cut to see what was going on.

Just after the second shot she came upon the scene which she had interrupted.

"It seems to me that you're a pretty nervy girl," said Ted.

The girl tossed her head with a laugh.

"It's my way, I guess," she replied. "I've been brought up to look out for myself, and I opine that I can do it."

"I'll bet you can, as well as any man," said Jesse.

They talked with Miss Cooke for perhaps half an hour longer, and then she bade them good-bye, saying she would expect to see them at her dad's place on the following Sunday.

Ted and Jesse gathered together their prospecting tools and started for Carson.

Both were satisfied that their search for copper had been successful at last, and they decided to pay another visit to the cut on Sunday morning, bringing their lunch, and afterward go on to the home of Tess.

"It was mighty lucky for you that that girl turned up in the nick of time to save you, Ted," remarked Jesse.

"There isn't any doubt about it. I'll never have a closer call for my life. I could read murder in that scoundrel's eyes. He meant to do me up and then skip the country, for after that it wouldn't have been safe for him to be seen in this neighborhood."

"You're going to notify the sheriff about his attack on you, aren't you?"

"Yes, it's the best thing I can do, for it won't be safe for us to go around the country here as long as he is at large."

"That's right. He ought to be taken care of. It's safe to bet that some day he'll be strung up for murder."

"I wouldn't be surprised. He's a hard nut."

"I should say he is. He's one of the bad men you read about."

The boys reached their home without further adventure, and soon after they had cleaned themselves and spruced up a bit the supper bell rang and they went down to the dining-room.

After the meal the boys went into town and called at the residence of the sheriff of the county.

He was home, and they detailed the adventure they had had with Tug Ralston.

"He was only let out this morning," said the sheriff. "He didn't lose any time getting back to his old tricks. Well, I'll look after him, and I don't figure he'll escape me unless he's already made tracks for the next county. If I get him you'll be wanted as witnesses."

"You can send to the mine for us, or to our boarding-house, the Miners' Rest," replied Ted.

"That's a right smart gal—Tess. She's the daughter of old man Cooke, a prospector and mining expert," said the sheriff. "She's accounted a dead shot, and can draw a gun quicker'n any man I ever met. I saw a specimen of her shooting at ten yards one night at the Wyoming Saloon, where she went to fetch her father, who has a periodical weakness for crooking his elbow. The old man didn't want to go home with her, and the gang who had him in tow backed him up. She drew her gun on the ringleader, but he only laughed at her, and said he guessed she was only good to be kissed, and he calculated he'd honor her by giving her the first smack. 'I'll show you what I'm good for,' she said in a tone that rang business. 'Tack a five-spot on that wall yonder, and if I don't nail every pip square in the center you can keep my father here and kiss me into the bargain.' 'Done!' replied the chap. 'If you win the old man goes with you.' 'I guess he will,' she replied coolly, 'for I'm

going to keep one shot for the man that tries to prevent me taking him." Somebody put the card against the wall and the crowd looked for fun. Well, blame me if that gal didn't plunk that card in five seconds with five balls, every one as true as a die. The crowd was paralyzed. Then she called her old man and told him to walk. "Has anyone got any objections?" she asked, looking around with her smoking gun in her hand. Nobody had, and so she led the old man away, and since that day the whole town takes its hat off to Tess Cooke."

"I don't wonder Tug Ralston gave in when he saw who he was up against," laughed Ted. "How came she to learn to shoot so good?"

"I'll never tell you. It comes natural to her."

"It's lucky for me that she had her gun with her to-day."

"She always carries it. She needs it for her protection, for a pretty gal like her attracts a whole lot of attention. It is said that no man but her father has ever kissed her. Several men have boasted that they were going to do it at the first chance they got. She heard about it and sent them word that if they could kiss her quicker than she could draw her gun they were welcome to, but she gave them to understand that the man who failed would be a subject for the undertaker. Probably that's why she carries her weapon. At any rate, no man has yet had the nerve to tackle her, for her old man said he'd better make his will first."

"Tess Cooke seems to be a corker," said Ted to Jesse on their way home.

"She is, for fair. I've heard a whole lot about her since I've been in the mine, but to-day is the first time I've seen her."

"I wonder why she don't live in town instead of up along the creek?" said Ted.

"If you're curious to learn you'll have to ask her, for I don't know. Maybe it's on account of her old man."

"You mean she can't trust him where there are so many saloons?"

"Very likely. It's not so hard to keep him sober when he's away from temptation."

The ensuing week passed away all too slowly for Ted.

He was continually thinking about Tess Cooke, and the visit he and Jesse were pledged to pay her on the following Sunday afternoon.

He knew many pretty girls in Petersville, and in the vicinity of the farm where he was raised, but none of them could hold a candle to Tess.

Then her fearlessness appealed to him.

She was a girl after his own heart—a girl who could face the world unflinchingly.

In a word, she was one in a thousand, and that was the kind of girl he took his hat off to.

As the days passed no word came from the sheriff with respect to Tug Ralston.

"The rascal must have left the district," Ted said to Jesse, as they were on their way to their boarding-house after work.

"Sure thing," replied his friend. "If he hadn't Sheriff King would have nabbed him before this."

"It's a good thing he's lit out. I should never feel quite easy while he was about. He has it in for me good and hard, and under those circumstances I have no wish to meet him at a disadvantage again."

"I should say not. He'd shoot you as quick as wink. He only played with you last Sunday because he thought there was no escape for you. If he met you again he wouldn't take any more chances."

"That's just the way I look at it. I'm not yearning to become an angel yet awhile. I've a whole lot to live for."

"A copper mine, for instance," grinned Jesse.

"Yes. If I've dreamed once I've dreamed every night about that mine," said Ted. "Last night I thought I was worth a million. Had a fine office in a big city, owned a private car, two or three automobiles, a steam yacht, and I don't know what."

"That must have been a dandy dream."

"It was while it lasted; but when I woke up and found I had to go to work in the mine just like the rest of the boys, I tell you the reality tasted mighty bitter in my mouth. I'd rather not dream such things."

"Maybe your dream may come true one of these days."

"I hope it may. It can't come any too quick for me. This kind of life is too strenuous for my blood. I like to move around in the sunlight. I've been used to that all my life. This delving down in the gloom of the tunnels is something fierce. I mean to stick it out, though, for I'm not a quitter. I'll stick to it till Fortune takes a turn in my favor."

"What does your mother say about you staying out here?"

"She doesn't like it. She's always begging me to come back home. Says she misses me terribly. That I'm her only boy, and so on. I tell her to have patience. I wrote her Sunday night that we had found every indication of copper on my property, and that in my next I hoped to be able to assure her of the fact beyond any reasonable doubt."

"Don't you worry but there's copper on your land. It's there. The only question is whether it's in quantities large enough to warrant working. I'll find that out for you next Sunday, I hope. I'm almost sure we struck a big vein in that hill. If the vein amounts to anything your fortune is made."

"And so is yours, Jesse. You shall ride in your own automobile, too."

"Gee! I hate the blamed things. Give me a horse for mine. I like to feel flesh and blood under me. Those machines are always breaking down when you aren't looking for it, then you have to crawl under them in the dust and fix up something with a wrench, or put more gasoline into the tank, or do something else."

"Oh, you'd get used to them after awhile and you wouldn't give your machine up for a farm. I've heard people talk like you before, and sooner or later they eat their words. An auto is the greatest thing on earth. Get a high-power one and it will make half the railroad trains look like thirty cents for speed. When I get rich the first thing I'll buy will be an auto, and the best I can find."

At length Sunday came around, but it brought an unexpected change of programme.

Jesse met with an accident in the mine Saturday afternoon, and the doctor said he'd have to stay in bed for several days till his leg mended.

Ted would have postponed his trip to the cut on his property only for the fact that he was impatient to see Tess Cooke.

The girl was on his brain, and nothing would satisfy him but he must keep his engagement.

Under those circumstances he decided that he might as well look in at the cut on his way over to her home on the creek.

So he took a few of the tools after dinner, bade Jesse good-bye and started.

He reached his property and made his way to the cut.

There he spent an hour picking up specimens which he intended to take over and submit to Miss Cooke's father's inspection.

He was an old and experienced prospector, and his judgment on the ore was to be relied on.

Ted filled his bag with bits of the ore he secured from the cut and then started for the creek.

His way took him through a wood, and the afternoon being warm, he sat down to rest himself for a while.

While lolling in the shade of a big tree with a thick, round trunk he examined his specimens with a feeling of satisfaction.

"There is copper in these rocks beyond doubt. Plenty of it. I know what copper ore is by this time. I see enough of it every day, goodness knows. If I ever get to be president of a copper company I'll be able to talk facts from practical experience. Some day the papers may have something to say about me—that is, if I become one of the copper barons. Something after this fashion: 'Theodore Brown, the wealthy copper king, was once on a time a boy copper miner. He——'"

Ted didn't get any further with his castle-building.

He suddenly heard a noise in the bushes in front of him, and looking in that direction he saw to his dismay the villainous-looking countenance of Tug Ralston within a couple of rods of the spot where he sat.

CHAPTER VI.

TREED BY THE ENEMY.

Ted sprang to his feet with extraordinary agility, but Tug had seen him and was evidently prepared for the encounter.

"Stop where you are!" he roared in a hoarse, snappish voice, raising himself and covering Ted with a rifle. "If you move an eye-lid I'll drill you quicker'n a flash of lightning."

The boy, realizing that he was in a bad box, made no further movement, but watched his enemy with a wary eye.

Ralston looked cool and impudent as he stood there gloating over the situation.

He also looked very much the worse in general appearance.

His face was drawn and cadaverous, and somewhat resembled a famished hyena.

His tangled hair and a ten days' growth of beard added to his fierce look.

"I guess I've got you at last, Ted Brown," he growled. "I've been waitin' a week for the chance, but I knew it would come, for I counted on that visit you was goin' to pay to that she-cat who saved your life last Sunday. Well, she won't save you this time, you can gamble on it. Lightning don't strike twice in the same place."

Ted looked at the rascal with critical attention.

He saw that he held his rifle in his hands in such a way that the muzzle of it could easily be brought to bear on his victim.

The boy was rapidly revolving some plan in his mind that would help him to escape his vindictive pursuer.

In order to gain time he opened up a conversation.

"I guess you're joking, Ralston, aren't you? You swore not to interfere with me hereafter."

"S'pose I did. I've changed my mind since."

"But an oath is an oath. You've no right to go back on that."

"I've a right to do as I please."

"I s'pose that's the reason you've been letting your beard grow."

"Don't you worry about my beard. I shaved before you was born, and I sha'n't shave again till after you're dead; but I guess I won't have to wait long, for you ain't got more than three minutes to draw your breath."

"How long?"

"Three minutes."

"That isn't very long."

"It's long enough for you to say your prayers in."

"Do you mean to say you're going to shoot me?"

"If I said I wasn't I'd be the worst liar on two feet," replied Ralston grimly.

"What good will that do you?"

"That's my business."

"Don't you know that would be deliberate murder?"

"Well, it won't be the fir—the three minutes are up. If you'll shut up and say your prayers I'll give you two more."

"If you shoot me you'll make the mistake of your life, and I can prove it to you in less than five minutes," said Ted desperately.

"No, you can't, so don't waste your time tryin'. If you want to say your prayers blaze away lively, as I'm tired chinnin' to you."

Ted looked into that hard, relentless eye, but there was not the slightest indication of any change of purpose.

"Do you think it's a brave act to shoot a boy?"

"Shut up and say your prayers if you mean to; but I don't believe the prayers of a kid like you amount to much," replied Ralston with a sneer.

Ted's object had been to try and distract Ralston's attention so that he might dart behind the trunk of the big tree at the foot of which he had been sitting; but in this he failed, for Tug never for a moment took his eyes off him.

Several times the scoundrel half raised his rifle as if to fire at the boy, but dropped it again.

Ted, finding that his enemy was watching him like a cat does a mouse, began to lose hope.

It didn't seem possible that he could escape the fate Ralston had evidently marked out for him.

As a last desperate resort Ted adopted an old, threadbare ruse.

It required good acting on the boy's part to make it pass muster, but as his life was at stake he threw his whole soul into it.

"Quick, Jesse!" he shouted earnestly, looking straight behind Tug, as if he saw his friend in the bushes; "hit him!"

Tug Ralston was deceived and thrown off his guard.

He swung around to ward off a threatened rear attack,

but saw nobody there, nor did he hear the slightest sound in the bushes.

Then he realized he had been deceived by Ted.

With a terrible imprecation he turned back again, only to find that his victim had disappeared.

Ted had slipped behind the tree, which was wide enough to conceal him completely.

Ralston was deeply chagrined at the march the boy had played on him, and he swore like a trooper.

His first impression was that the boy had rushed for the bushes and hid himself, and he prepared to start after him.

A moment's reflection altered that view.

There was quite an open space around and behind the tree, and the ruffian calculated that Ted could not have covered it and vanished in the short space of time his ruse had given him.

The only other refuge in sight was the tree, and there he judged the boy was hiding.

"I'm on to you, Ted Brown," he growled with a ring of satisfaction in his tones. "Come out from behind that tree."

Ted refused to accept the invitation.

"All right, youngster, if you won't come out I'll have to go there and blow your roof off."

Thus speaking Ralston moved toward the tree.

Ted's ruse would only have gained him a few minutes of life but for the fact that on this occasion he was armed.

He had taken the precaution, on general principles, to fetch Ralston's revolver along.

It was fortunate, indeed, that he had done so.

Had the rascal entertained any such suspicions he would have been more cautious in his movements.

As it was, he adopted none of the precautions which such a knowledge would have imposed on any reasonable man.

Ted heard his heavy footsteps in the grass and stood with the cocked weapon in his hand awaiting the climax of the desperate adventure.

He didn't dare look around the tree to see how close Ralston was lest such an exposure of his person might lead to fatal results.

Nor could he tell which side the scoundrel was coming.

He could only trust to luck.

Ralston, however, made a bad mistake at this point.

He stopped and spoke again when within a yard of the tree.

"I'll give you one more chance to come out and five minutes to say your prayers," he said.

Ted, hastily taking note of the location of the voice, thrust his revolver around the tree and fired.

A howl of pain and rage followed the shot.

Ralston, slightly wounded by the bullet, hurriedly retreated to the bushes, where Ted could hear him swearing and growling like some disappointed wild beast.

Ted, however, had only checked, not defeated him.

The boy listened with intense anxiety to discover the next movement of his wily enemy.

He was afraid to look around the tree lest Ralston might be on the alert for such a move on his part and put an ounce ball in his brain.

The villain, having a wholesome respect for a weapon in another person's hand, kept under cover of the bushes and waited for Ted to do something.

He held his rifle ready for business and kept his relentless eye on the tree.

As nothing happened for full five minutes, which seemed an age to him, he began to grow impatient.

He wondered angrily how long Ted proposed to remain behind the tree.

The boy was willing to remain there indefinitely in order to escape the bullet of his foe.

That was a natural conclusion, but it didn't jibe well with Ralston's feelings.

He cursed himself for not having shot Ted in the first place when he had him under his eye.

The truth of the matter was that it was his nature to play with his victim, and for a second time by yielding to that temptation his quarry had escaped him.

However, he hadn't actually lost Ted this time.

The end was only deferred.

While he was snarling under his breath at the lapse of time a brilliant idea occurred to his mind.

He wondered why he had not thought of it before.

With a grim smile at his own astuteness he rose from his crouching position and began to circle around the tree.

He calculated that when he reached a certain point of the circle he would be able to see Ted behind the tree.

It was impossible for him to carry out this plan in complete silence.

Ted's sharp ears heard the rustling of the dried branches beneath his tread, and the occasional snapping of a twig.

He wondered what game Ralston was up to.

As he listened the sound at length told him that the man was trying to outflank him.

As soon as Ted realized this move on his adversary's part he began to move an inch at a time in the reverse direction.

In this way he was able to easily defeat Ralston's tactics, which were singularly deficient in range, for nothing but a surprise could make them successful.

While the rascal was moving a hundred rods to secure his position, Ted could foil him by taking a single step.

In the course of a short time Ralston discovered that he was not so bright as he thought he was.

Finally, fully satisfied that his strategy was a failure, he squatted down again in the bushes to await a demonstration on the part of his victim.

Ted, finding that his enemy had grown tired of pursuing an unprofitable game, remained where he was.

Every little while he could hear Ralston cursing at the delay, but the man's impatience did not worry him any, though he was anxious himself to bring the contest to a conclusion, for his perilous position was calculated to wear on his nerves.

The game, however, promised to be prolonged to a most unreasonable length.

While he listened intently for any sounds that might indicate a new move on Ralston's part, Ted kept up a lively train of thought.

He knew his enemy was watching the opposite side of the tree with great intentness, and the happy thought occurred to him to try to draw the man's fire by a bit of strategy which was as old as the hills.

He had read of the scheme in some boy's book where it had worked successfully.

He wondered if he couldn't dupe Ralston by it.

Slipping off his jacket he rolled it up so as to form the resemblance of a head.

Placing his cap upon the top of the bundle he cautiously exposed the dummy on one side of the tree, withdrawing it suddenly two or three times to increase the delusion in the mind of his enemy.

At first no results followed, and Ted began to think that Ralston was not to be fooled this way.

After repeating the operation several times he slowly pushed the dummy around the opposite side of the tree.

The crack of Ralston's rifle broke the silence of the wood, and Ted felt the blow of the ball when it struck the cap.

The critical moment had come, and without the loss of a second Ted left the security of the tree and darted off in the direction of the creek.

CHAPTER VII.

FUTURE EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE.

Ralston uttered a yell of rage on perceiving that his shot had failed of results, and he started after the boy as fast as he could.

Although strong and big he was no match for Ted as a runner.

Seeing that his victim was bound to get away, Tug stopped, shoved another cartridge into his gun, dropped on one knee and fired just as Ted vanished around a clump of bushes.

The bullet passed within a yard of the boy, who kept on till he reached the creek.

Then he ran up the stream for a quarter of a mile, when he saw a neatly-built, story-and-a-half house.

In a few minutes he was knocking smartly on the door, while he kept his eyes over his shoulder on the lookout for Ralston.

The door was opened by Tess Cooke, and Ted staggered inside and sank down exhausted by the run and the tense excitement through which he had just passed.

"What's the matter, Ted Brown?" asked Tess in some concern.

"I was nearly shot by Tug Ralston," gasped the boy, as he tried to pull himself together.

"By Tug Ralston!" cried the girl. "I thought——"

"He had skipped the neighborhood? Well, he's fooled the sheriff and everybody else into that belief. He's been in hiding—waiting to catch me to-day when I called on you. He heard Jesse and me make the arrangement with you last Sunday afternoon at the cut, and he kept it in mind. This time he's got a rifle."

"A rifle!"

"Yes. I wouldn't have cared so much if it had only been a revolver, for I had one myself, and am not afraid to meet him on even terms; but a rifle put all the advantage of the situation in his hands. He caught me off my guard and had me dead to rights. He could easily have killed me while we stood talking."

"What prevented him?"

"The same thing that held him off in the cut long enough for you to come up and save me—his desire to play with me before he did me up. He wanted me to suffer the antici-

tion of coming death. Well, I fooled him with an old trick."

Ted then told the whole story of his strenuous adventure to the girl.

She heard him in silence, expressed her sympathy for him and then went outside to the kitchen where her father was smoking and reading a magazine.

She brought him into the room and introduced Ted to him.

"Now tell your story over again to father," she said.

The boy did so.

The old man knitted his brow during the recital.

"Then he knew that you were bound here?" he said.

Ted nodded.

"He'll lay for you when you start to return. But don't be alarmed. Tess and I will see that you get back to town all right, and the sheriff shall be notified that the rascal is hanging around here trying to get back at you."

Ted soon got over his scare and passed several hours very pleasantly with the girl and her father.

He had supper with them, as a matter of course, and during the meal the young copper miner told old man Cooke about his property and the plain evidences he had found of copper in the ground.

"I brought a bag of specimens to show you, Mr. Cooke, but left it under the tree where Ralston attacked me."

Ted described the tree and told the prospector he would find the bag there if he looked for it during the week.

"I should like to have you examine the specimens and tell me what you think about them. I should also like you to go to the cut on my property some time when you have the time and look at what my friend Jesse says is the beginning of a vein of copper ore. Whatever trouble you're put to I'll make it all right with you."

"Dad will do it for you without charging you a cent," spoke up Tess.

She showed an interest both in Ted and his hopes of a copper harvest, and there is no doubt that if her father was not particularly interested she intended to make him investigate the matter for the boy.

When Ted said he guessed that it was time for him to go, Tess and her father got ready to accompany him.

The old man got his boat out and the three slipped quietly down the creek to a point below Ted's property.

Then they cut across the country, passing close to the Lookout mine, and left Ted at the door of his boarding-house.

He thanked them both, especially Tess, for their kindness, and accepted an invitation to call at their house soon again.

Next morning the sheriff was informed about the incident in which Ted had nearly lost his life the preceding afternoon, and, calling a larger force of deputies together, the posse started to beat the neighborhood up with the view of capturing Tug Ralston.

The rascal, anticipating such a move, took time by the forelock and disappeared, and the strictest search proved unfruitful.

Of course Jesse was surprised and much concerned when Ted related his adventure to him.

"That villain seems determined to get you," said Jesse. "He's taken a fearful grouch against you on account of

that little incident in the mine. It would have been better if you had not resented his act of pulling you out of the car. You had to wait for the next cage, anyhow. I'm mighty sorry that the fall he got on his head didn't kill him. It would have been a good riddance if he had been planted in the cemetery. As it is, you'll never feel thoroughly safe until he's shot or put behind the bars for a long term."

"There is no use crying over spilled milk, Jesse. Although I'm sorry that I put my foot in it, I don't much regret that smash in the eye I gave the villain. I only hope that the next time we meet it may be on even terms."

"He's not a chap that's willing to give an enemy a fair show. He's a born coward, even if he is as strong as a small Samson. I doubt if he would attack anybody without getting the bulge on him beforehand. That poor fellow he killed in the mine had no show to defend himself, I'll bet. You are uncommonly fortunate to have eluded him twice after he had you in a corner."

Ted agreed with him, and after that he made a point always to carry his revolver.

On the following Sunday Ted and Jesse went over to call on Tess.

The girl gave Ted a particularly warm welcome.

It was evident that she had taken a great fancy to him, and the feeling was reciprocated by Ted.

Old man Cooke also showed a friendly attitude toward the boy.

It soon developed that he had been over at Ted's property and had made investigations that proved beyond doubt that there was a rich lead of copper ore on the boy's land.

"If you want me to bring the facts to the notice of the officers of the Lookout mine you're bound to get a good offer for your ground. I should say that it will not be under \$100,000."

Ted's heart jumped with satisfaction, and Jesse's eyes sparkled.

"I would suggest, however, that you keep the matter dark for the present," said the old man. "The copper won't run away. I will make further investigations later on which I hope, for your sake, will prove the ground to be much more valuable than I figure it at present. You are young yet and have no need to rush things. In my opinion you would do better to get some responsible person, in whom you and your mother have perfect confidence, to form a company, in case future developments warrant it, and mine the ore independently of the Lookout people. In that way your interests would be fully protected, and you would eventually obtain much larger results than you would secure by selling the ground as it is for even a sum that might be considered handsome."

Ted thanked Mr. Cooke for his advice and told him that he intended to follow it.

"It is the goal of my ambition to become the head of a copper mine. It would give me a steady income, and the principal would be out of my reach unless I chose to sell my stock and get out of it," replied the boy.

After supper, while the prospector and Jesse were arguing some matter connected with mines and mining, Ted and Tess slipped outside and took a quiet stroll along the bank of the creek.

It is not necessary to record what they said to each other on this occasion, as it wouldn't interest the reader, but

there is no doubt that the conversation and the walk proved very satisfactory to themselves.

Ted made the most of his opportunity to make himself solid with the girl, and she exercised all her fascinations upon him, so that when the time came for them to part they had a warmer feeling for each other than that of brother and sister.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF TESS COOKE.

Several weeks passed away and nothing more was heard from Tug Ralston.

Every Sunday Ted and Jesse walked over to the Cooke home together and took supper, after which Tess and Ted invariably disappeared together.

Jesse didn't say anything, neither did the old man.

Both seemed to understand how the wind blew.

If the prospector had any objection the boys didn't hear of it.

At any rate it wouldn't have counted much, for Tess ran the ranch, and whatever she said or did was law with her father.

He loved his daughter as much as any parent, but unfortunately he also had a strong regard for bug-juice.

Tess had succeeded in weaning him away from the Carson saloons by a compromise which permitted him to keep a private jug at home.

But it was against orders for him to get a jag on.

Tess had gauged the number of drinks he could take from morn till nightfall when he was at home and keep sober, and set the limit, beyond which he did not go.

He had his orders when away from home, and if he overstepped the mark the girl generally found it out and read him the riot act.

Although the sheriff was of the opinion that Tug Ralston was a long way from the neighborhood of Carson, such, however, was not the case.

He was in hiding not many miles north of the Lookout mine.

His retreat was an underground cavern in the midst of a thick wood.

Entrance to it was to be had through the hollow trunk of one of the giants of the forest.

Tug discovered it one day by accident.

While trying to throw the sheriff's posse off his scent he entered a thick clump of bushes, and while squeezing himself as far back as possible he found an aperture in the outer bark of the tree big enough for a man to pass through.

He lost no time taking advantage of this refuge, but as the interior of the tree was as dark as pitch he did not notice there was a big hole there, through which he tumbled before he knew what had happened to him.

When he recovered his wits he struck a match to find out what kind of a trap he had fallen into.

To his amazement he found himself in a subterranean room which was evidently the work of man.

The place had been dug out and roofed with boards braced like the tunnel of a mine.

It was divided into two sections by a bulkhead, with an opening for communication.

The floor and walls were of earth, beaten hard.

The only means of entrance and egress was through the hollow tree, and Ralston found a rope ladder hanging down from one side of the hole through which he had fallen.

Clearly this retreat was the work of men, probably outlaws, who required a secure haven of refuge when pursuit was hot.

Tug found rude wooden benches, a rough table, capable of seating a dozen men, a supply of pots, pans and other cooking utensils, quite an outfit of coarse crockery piled up in a cheap-looking closet with shelves, a small keg nearly full of whisky, a rifle (the same that he used subsequently against Ted), a cartridge belt, and various other things of a miscellaneous nature.

The place had evidently been deserted for months, if not for years, and Ralston was tickled to death over it.

"I can lie here as snug as a bug in a rug for as long as I please and the sheriff will never smoke me out," he said to himself in a tone of satisfaction. "All I need is grub, and I guess I'll be able to pick up a supply of that, while there's whisky enough here to last me six months or more. I call this a regular find. I'm safer here than if I was in the next State."

Looking into the next room he found a dozen litters of straw, each covered with a pair of army blankets.

This was the bedroom of the gang that built the cavern.

"By jingo!" he ejaculated, with a grin. "This is as good as a cheap hotel."

There were farms not so far away, upon which Ralston descended in the dead of night and supplied himself with eggs, poultry, and even a sheep.

There was a pit not far from the tree in which he made a fire and cooked his food after dark.

It was not necessary for him to do this more than twice a week, and he only did it once in the week immediately after his last attack on Ted, and during that interval he seldom ventured to the surface.

Although he became grouchy for lack of congenial society, he did not dare notify any of his old cronies of his proximity, so he amused himself playing solitaire, filling up on whisky and sleeping off its effects.

As time passed he began to figure again on getting back at Ted Brown.

He also felt a strong resentment against Tess Cooke because she rescued Ted from his clutches.

He would have liked to get square with her, too, but he knew her reputation as a pistol expert and a fearless girl, and was afraid to tackle her.

Tess had the habit of taking long walks or rides around the country.

One day she rode out to visit a girl friend who lived on a farm not far from the wood where Ralston's subterranean retreat was situated.

On her way back home she skirted the wood.

Tug happened to be airing himself above ground at the time and saw her coming.

He shrank back among the bushes so that she would not recognize him.

He didn't dare molest her, for he knew she carried her revolver with her, and he had no desire to stop a bit of cold lead.

The girl and her mare were nearly opposite to him when

a dog suddenly burst through a thicket and sprang barking at the horse.

The animal, taken by surprise, shied, and the girl, though a fine rider, was thrown to the ground.

The shock partly stunned her.

Ralston saw his advantage and availed himself of it.

He sprang forward, took the revolver from the small holster attached by a belt around her back, then gagged and bound the girl with his own handkerchief and hers.

Seizing her in his arms he quickly carried her to the hollow tree, down the rope ladder, and threw her on one of the straw beds.

There he left her to recover her senses.

An hour later the mare turned up at the Cooke home.

The old prospector knew at once that something was wrong.

He hardly believed that his daughter had been thrown by the animal.

It was his impression that somebody, probably two or three men, had attacked her unawares, and after robbing her of the few dollars she always carried, had let her go to find her way home on foot.

After waiting an hour for her to turn up he started to look her up, taking the road he knew she had followed to go to the Golding farm.

Finding no trace of her anywhere, he kept on to the farm.

There he learned that she had started for home several hours before.

His anxiety over her was so great that the farmer and two of his help mounted horses and accompanied him back.

They looked everywhere along the route that she was believed to have taken, but found no signs of her.

When they reached the cottage it was dark and silent, just as the prospector had left it.

Old man Cooke was now seriously alarmed for his child.

He and the farm people rode back and scoured the country for hours without result.

The disappearance of Tess was a great mystery, and her father had never been so broken up before, unless it was when his wife died some years since.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH TED FINDS TESS.

It was late Saturday afternoon that Tess Cooke disappeared, and next morning the news was known in town.

The sheriff was a particular friend of old man Cooke, so the prospector appealed to him to help find his daughter.

The officer called his friends together and off they went to the neighborhood where the girl had vanished.

Ted heard the news about the middle of the forenoon.

"Say, Jesse," he cried, rushing up to his chum, his face ablaze with anxiety and excitement, "I've just learned that something has happened to Tess Cooke."

"Something happened to her!" ejaculated Jesse.

"They say she's disappeared, and her old man is crazy about her."

"Why, where could she disappear to?"

"That's what is bothering her father. Get your coat on; we must go out to his house and find out if this report is really true. I couldn't rest a minute if anything has happened to her."

"You think a whole lot of her, don't you, Ted?"

"Bet your life I do. Why shouldn't I, when she saved my life?"

"You'd be willing to save hers, too, if that was necessary."

"I guess I would. I'd go through fire and water for her."

Ted set a hot pace, and inside of an hour they reached the Cooke home.

They found the old man and several men who had just returned from another unsuccessful search.

In a few words the prospector told the boys the little he knew about the disappearance of his daughter.

He also told them about the close search he and several men had made of the country, and how the sheriff and a considerable force were still at it.

"You can't tell just where she might have met with an accident, can you?" said Ted.

"No, but she disappeared somewhere between here and the Golding farm."

Ted asked where the Golding farm lay, and then he and Jesse started off in that direction.

When they reached the wood they stopped to rest, and as luck would have it Ted sat on the grass in the very spot where the girl was thrown.

While fanning himself with his hat he saw something sparkle in the grass.

He picked it up and looked at it.

He recognized it at once as the locket containing his picture which he had lately given Tess.

"Look here!" he cried to his chum. "Tess has been here. This locket belongs to her. I gave it to her last Sunday. See where the thin chain snapped off? We must hunt around here. If she was thrown by her mare and hurt she may have crawled some little distance in the grass, and then been unable to go further. You hunt in that direction and I'll take this."

The boys started to search the immediate neighborhood with great zeal, and gradually became separated.

Ted's course took him close by the great hollow oak.

His sharp eyes detected that the grass and earth thereabout were well trampled by heavy boots.

He also found a small piece of Tess's dress hanging to a sharp twig.

"Looks as if she was overpowered and carried off by some men," he muttered. "They seem to have passed through these bushes."

He worked his way in that direction and presently came face to face with the opening in the tree.

"This old tree appears to be hollow," he breathed. "Can it be that the scoundrels killed the girl and shoved her body in there?"

His heart stood still at the bare supposition of such a thing.

He looked in at the opening, but could see nothing.

Then he flashed a match inside.

He perceived at once the hole leading downward through the roots.

He lighted a second match and held it down the hole.

His astonished eyes lighted on the rope ladder, swinging against the wall.

Evidently it was there to afford communication with the bottom of the hole.

There must be some reason for that fact.

While Ted was wondering what the meaning of it all was the match expired in his fingers.

"Looks to me as if there was a pit or cave down there," he mused. "I've a mind to go down and see."

He leaned as far down as he could and listened.

He heard nothing.

"Well, I'm going down to see what's there, at any rate. It won't take me more than a minute or two."

Having come to this resolution he crawled inside the tree, felt for the upper rung of the rope ladder, and then began to descend into pitchy darkness.

The place seemed to widen out around him, but he could see nothing.

At last he touched the solid ground.

Turning around he was about to strike a match when he saw a faint gleam of light twenty feet away.

That indicated that there was somebody there, and Ted stopped and put his hand on the butt of his revolver.

As an intruder he was liable to be up against trouble, and he wanted to be prepared to meet it.

It struck him that it would be more prudent for him to return to the surface and summon Jesse to back him up.

He began to entertain a strong suspicion that Tess Cooke might be a prisoner in this place.

In no other way could he account for her mysterious disappearance.

While he stood undecided as to what he should do he heard the gruff tones of a man's voice where the light was.

The place appeared to be divided in two parts, the man and the light being in the further one.

Ted decided to risk striking a match.

He did it on his trousers leg, and he caught a brief survey of the underground room before him, and the outlines of the bulkhead beyond.

He located the long table, the benches and other impedimenta before the match went out, and had satisfied himself that there was no one that side of the bulkhead.

As Ted listened he heard another voice reply to the gruff one.

It sounded as if it might be a girl's.

The very suspicion that it was thrilled the boy.

He determined to make sure.

With great caution he made his way to the opening into the section beyond the bulkhead, holding his revolver in his hand.

Before he reached it he had heard and recognized Tess's voice.

The man's voice also had a familiar ring.

It hardly needed a sight of the fellow's villainous features to satisfy him that it was Tug Ralston who was threatening Tess, like the coward he was.

It made Ted's blood boil to think that the girl of his heart was at the mercy of such a scoundrel.

But it shouldn't be for many moments more if he could help it.

Glancing through the doorway he saw Tess lying with her hands bound behind her upon one of the beds.

She regarded her captor and tormentor with her customary fearlessness.

As far as the wordy contest went Ralston was getting decidedly the worst of it.

He seemed to be partially under the influence of liquor.

"Well, I've got you, at any rate, and what's more I'm goin' to keep you here till I've shot that young fool, Ted Brown. Then I'll light out and you can go back to your old man," Ralston was saying.

"If you should shoot Ted Brown you'd better order your own coffin at the same time," retorted Tess, in a tense tone. "I'd follow you to the end of the earth if I had to, and I'd shoot you down like a dog at the first chance I got."

"Yah! You little spitfire!" snarled the rascal. "I believe you would do it, but I'll take good care that you never find out where I've gone."

"I'd find you if it took me years to do it, and when I did I'd put so many holes into you that you'd look more like a sieve than a human being."

"You talk to hear yourself, gal," sneered Ralston. "They say no man has ever dared to kiss you because you're so handy with your gun. Well, I reckon I'm goin' to kiss you now, with or without your consent."

"If you do you'll regret it, as sure as my name is Tess Cooke," replied the girl fiercely, her eyes flashing fire.

"I'll take my chances on that," he chuckled with a tipsy leer. "And what's more, I'm goin' to kiss you every day while you're here, d'ye understand?"

He advanced on the girl with an unsteady step, and leaning over seized her helpless form in his arms.

She struggled as best she could to evade the pollution of his rum-soaked and tobacco-sodden lips; but even had her arms been free her strength would have availed her nothing against his.

She felt his reeking breath on her face, and uttered a cry like a wounded animal, when—smash!

The butt of Ted's revolver descended on the rascal's head, and he dropped like a steer stricken in the shambles.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIRST KISS.

"Tess!" cried Ted, pushing the insensible scoundrel aside with his foot. "It is I—Ted, come to save you!"

He raised her in his arms, and as her eyes met his in the gloom even of the place, she knew him, and uttered a thrilling cry of delight.

"Ted, Ted!" she exclaimed, and dropped her head on his shoulder.

He thrust his revolver back into his hip pocket, and set to work to unloosen the knot of the handkerchief that held her wrists together.

"Yes, it's me, all right, and Jesse is outside, too," he said as he worked away.

"Oh, Ted, I'm so glad you've come to save me from that brute. Had he succeeded in kissing me I believe I should have killed him the moment I got a weapon of any kind in my hands."

"Never mind, Tess. Calm down. He didn't kiss you. I'm afraid I should have shot him myself if he had done so. As it is, if I haven't broken his skull it's because it's an uncommonly thick one."

As soon as her arms were free she threw them impulsively around Ted's neck and looked lovingly into his face.

Then, before he knew what was coming, she kissed him full on the lips.

"There, I've done what I never did before in my life to anyone but my father and mother," she said with a rich flush on her face; "but I couldn't help it. I love you, Ted, and I don't care who knows it."

"And I love you, too, Tess, with all my heart."

As he uttered the words he kissed her as she had kissed him, and she smiled contentedly in his face.

"And now let us get away from this place," he said, releasing her. "But first we must secure this rascal so he will not be able to escape until the sheriff comes after him."

Ted tore one of the blankets in strips, and bound the fellow's arms behind his back, both at the elbows and at the wrists.

Then he tied his legs together.

While he was doing the latter Tess spied the butt of her revolver sticking from Ralston's hip pocket, and she immediately secured it.

Leaving the ruffian where he was, to recover his senses without aid, the boy took up the candle, stuck it in the neck of a bottle, and, with Tess by his side, walked into the other section of the underground cavern.

He placed the bottle on the table.

"This is a wonderfully secure retreat, Tess," he said, leading her toward the rope ladder. "The only entrance seems to be through a great hollow tree above, the opening to which is hidden by the bushes. It was made by human hands you can easily see, and it must have taken a bunch of men to do it. Has Ralston any companions to your knowledge?"

"I have neither seen nor heard anyone besides him since I was brought here yesterday afternoon," she answered.

"Then he may have accidentally found this place and was occupying it alone until he captured you. You shall tell me by and by how he managed to get you in his power, Tess."

"I can tell you now in a very few words," she replied. "While passing through this wood on my return from a visit to the Golding farm yesterday afternoon my mare was startled by the sudden appearance of a strange dog, and threw me. While I was suffering from the shock Tug Ralston came upon me, took my revolver away and then, after binding me with his handkerchief, and tying my own across my mouth, he carried me down into this underground cavern and laid me on one of those straw beds to recover. That's the whole story of how I came to be in his power."

"Well, Tess, here is the rope ladder. Will you go up first? Don't mind the darkness. You will find the opening in the tree before you. Step right out into the bushes, and I'll be with you in a moment."

While he placed his foot on the ladder to steady it she climbed up.

In a few moments he heard her call down "All right!"

Then he followed and found her standing just outside the opening.

Pushing their way through the bushes they reached the bridle-path.

"Jesse! Oh, Jesse!" shouted Ted.

"Hilloa!" came back from his chum at some distance.

"Tell me, Ted," said Tess, grasping the boy's arm lovingly with both of hers, "how did you find that cavern, and how did you know I was down there?"

"I found it by accident, and I did not know you were

down there. It was this that caused me to hunt around here for some evidence of your presence," and he took from his pocket the locket he had found in the grass, and handed it to her.

"My locket!" she cried. "I had not missed it."

She opened it and kissed his picture.

"I'd rather you'd kiss me than my picture," he said,

"Would you?" she asked with a coquettish glance.

Then she threw her arms around his neck and once more their lips met.

And it was a long kiss, too, for Jesse hove in sight as they separated.

"Hurrah!" shouted Dane when he caught sight of Tess.

"You've got her, have you?"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" replied Ted.

"Where in creation have you been, Tess?" asked Jesse.

"You'd never guess," replied Ted. "She's been a prisoner in an underground cavern."

"A prisoner in an underground cavern!"

"Exactly. And who do you suppose was keeping her there?"

"How should I know?"

"Then I'll tell you. It was Tug Ralston."

"You don't mean it!" almost gasped Jesse. "Do you mean to say that Ralston is in this neighborhood?"

"I do. I knocked him out with the butt end of my revolver a few minutes ago."

"Well, I don't see how he managed to keep clear of the sheriff."

"You would if you'd seen the snug hiding-place he's got."

"Where is it?"

"Do you see that big, thick oak tree yonder?"

Jesse nodded.

"The trunk is hollow."

"The dickens it is!"

"The roots are also hollow. In fact, a deep hole leads right down to a cavern under the ground. The sheriff evidently doesn't know of the existence of the place. It is furnished with a good-sized table, benches, and a dozen straw couches covered with blankets. It looks like the roosting place of a gang of bandits."

"There are no bandits in this neighborhood."

"No; but I heard there was some years ago when the Lookout mine first started."

"You say you knocked Ralston out?"

"I did."

"And he's down in that cavern?"

"Yes—securely bound hand and foot, waiting for the sheriff to take charge of him."

"I'm glad that I see his finish in sight. He's wicked enough to get a life sentence."

"If he gets five years I think it will be the most that'll happen to him," replied Ted.

While they were talking the party had started to walk back to the Cooke home, Tess holding on to Ted as if she considered him her private property.

Soon after striking the creek road they saw a small party of horsemen approaching them at a brisk trot.

It consisted of old man Cooke and his friends starting out for a more extended search of the country.

The prospector was riding a bit in advance and he immediately spotted his daughter and the boys.

With a shout he spurred on his animal, and alighting close to the young people he grabbed his child in his arms with tears of joy and relief running down his bronzed cheeks.

"Tess, Tess, where have you been since yesterday? What happened to you?" he asked after pressing her to his breast and kissing her several times.

"Dear old dad; did you miss me so much?" she replied with a fond caress.

"Tell me where you have been," he repeated tremulously.

"I've been a prisoner in an underground cave."

"A prisoner in an underground cave!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, and I'd have been there yet, and probably for some time, only for Ted Brown. He found me and rescued me from the rascal who had captured me."

"Who is the rascal who treated you this way, and where is he? If we catch him we'll hang him to the nearest tree."

"No, you mustn't hang him, dad, though he deserves it. You must turn him over to the sheriff. He's been looking for him for a week. It's Tug Ralston."

"Tug Ralston!" gritted the old man. "He shall suffer for this outrage. Where is he?"

"Ted will show you. He made a prisoner of him. You must thank Ted, dad, for saving me."

The old prospector grabbed Ted by the hands and thanked him with gratitude in his heart.

"Now," he said, "lead us to where this scoundrel is. We'll settle with him in mighty short order," added the old man grimly.

"I will on condition that you promise not to make it a hanging bee," replied Ted. "I can't be a party to turning that fellow off in such a way, bad as he is. You must agree to turn him over to the sheriff."

The prospector didn't want to agree to any such thing.

In his younger days he had been used to lynch law for offences far less serious in his opinion than this attack on his daughter.

The very idea of that rascal depriving his daughter of her liberty even for an hour was beyond pardon in his estimation.

The other men, more cool-headed and less interested, backed Ted up.

They declared that as long as Tug Ralston had not actually harmed Tess Cooke they could not go to extremes with him.

With everybody opposed to his summary plan the prospector reluctantly agreed to hand Ralston over to the authorities.

He took Ted up behind him on his horse, and while Tess and Jesse walked on to her home the mounted party, guided by Ted, proceeded to the hollow tree in the wood.

CHAPTER XI.

TED STARTS FOR HOME.

Less than an hour later the mounted party rode up to the Cooke home.

They had Tug Ralston, who had regained his senses, strapped on the back of one of the horses.

He looked like the hard case he was—dirty, unshaven and sullen.

Ted dismounted and rejoined Tess, while the rest of the

party, after finishing the contents of the old man's whisky jug, started for Carson with their prisoner.

The young people entertained one another until Pop Cooke returned.

Ted and Jesse helped the girl prepare dinner, which was all ready by the time the prospector got back with a glow of satisfaction on his rugged countenance.

During the meal Tess told her story to her father, and then Ted told him how he had discovered the entrance to the secret retreat underground.

"It's a whole lot of satisfaction to me to know that the rascal is under lock and key at last, with the pretty certain prospect of spending a good many moons in the State prison," said Ted.

"I'm so glad," said Tess. "I was always afraid that he would harm you, Ted."

"And I'm glad, too," put in Jesse. "I was always nervous about Ted myself."

Late that night, after the boys had gone home, the sheriff and his posse drew up before the Cooke home and the officer rapped on the door.

The prospector was aroused and looked out of the window.

"Hello, John," he said. "I've got Tess back."

"Glad to hear it," answered the sheriff. "Where is she?"

The old man told him all the particulars, winding up with the statement that he'd find Tug Ralston safe in the calaboose at Carson.

"That's good," replied the officer. "That young chap did you and Tess a good turn, and me one as well. He deserves the thanks of the county."

The posse rode away and the prospector went back to bed.

Next morning Ralston was brought before the Carson magistrate for examination.

Tess and Ted were on hand to give their evidence.

Ralston had nothing to advance in his own defense, so he was held for trial at the county seat.

The sheriff lost no time in taking him to the county jail, where he was provided with a cell till his day of trial.

Before that event came off old man Cooke had thoroughly prospected Ted's property and told him that the facts warranted his proceeding at once with the formation of a company to take over the ground and begin mining operations on an up-to-date principle.

So Ted decided to start for home to have a talk with his mother and set the ball rolling.

The nearest town on the railroad to Carson was Truxton, fifty miles distant, and Ted had to go there on horseback to catch a train East.

Tess hated to part with him, even for a few weeks, but she realized that she had to do it.

"You won't forget me, will you, Ted?" she said tearfully the night before he was to begin his journey. "You won't let any other girl come between us? Promise me."

"Of course I'll promise you," he said, kissing her. "Just as if any other girl stood the ghost of a show alongside of you."

"I should want to die if anything happened to take you away from me," she said.

"Oh, nothing is going to happen to do that," he answered. "You're the only girl I ever had, anyway."

"Am I?"

"Yes, you are."

"I'm so glad of that. I think I'd shoot any girl that tried to come between us. I'd shoot her and then kill myself."

"Don't talk nonsense, Tess. Are you going to be jealous of every girl that looks at me?"

"No-o; but I want you all myself."

"Well, you've got me all yourself."

"Not when you're away from me—hundreds of miles away."

"Can't you trust me?"

"Yes, of course; but——"

"But what?"

"I'm not like other girls. I've seen pictures of them in the magazines that dad takes. They dress in fine clothes, and they look prettier than me."

"Don't you believe that they're prettier than you. I think you're the loveliest girl in all the world."

"Do you honestly believe that, Ted?" she asked, nestling closer to him.

"Bet your life I do. Just wait till I'm president of my copper mining company, and we're married one of these days, I'll get you clothes that will make your head swim. Your father says that I'm bound to make a million or more out of the mine in time. A million is a whole lot of money. The interest on it alone would give a man a good income. Well, that million will be as much yours as mine. If I belong to you my money will, too."

"I don't care anything about your money. I'm satisfied to have you."

"Even if I was only a boy copper miner?" laughed Ted.

"Yes. I wouldn't care what you were."

"You'll think different one of these days. Wait till you come to live in a fine house, and dress like a lady, then you'll understand the value of money."

"Maybe so; but I wouldn't lose you for all the money and dresses in the world."

"I'm glad to hear it. By holding on to me you'll get the money and dresses, too, and the fine house, and servants to boss around."

"Oh, dear, I don't know what I should do with servants. I've always kept house for dad myself."

"Well, don't worry about the servant problem till you're up against it. I'm going to write you two or three times a week, and you must answer at least half my letters."

"I'll answer them all."

"So much the better. I'll be on the lookout for them."

Ted promised to ride out in the morning to bid her a final good-bye, and then he took his leave.

Jesse got leave of absence from the mine to see his chum off on his road East.

Ted met him at the mine after his last parting from Tess, and they rode together as far as the town of Dunkirk, nine miles from Carson.

There the boys shook hands and separated, and Ted continued on his way alone.

His course took him through the mountains, but the road was a good one all the way to Truxton, and was the route taken by the teams carting the copper ore to the railroad.

Ted calculated on reaching Sedgwick, a small town, about dark,

He intended to stop there for the night.

His animal, however, stepped into a hole and wrenched his foot, and the boy had to lead him a mile till he came to a brook, where he bathed the limb and gave him a rest.

The horse, however, limped a good bit after that, so that Ted had to favor him all he could lest he break down altogether.

The consequence was that darkness caught him many miles west of Sedgwick.

Furthermore, the sky had grown overcast and every moment looked more threatening.

"This is kind of hard luck," he said to himself. "Looks as if I'm in for a wetting. I don't know how far Sedgwick is from here, but I judge that it's quite a distance. It's liable to take me three or four hours to reach it at this rate. If I saw a house anywhere in sight I'd apply for supper and a night's lodging for myself and beast. A good night's rest ought to bring the animal around all right. But this seems to be a particularly lonesome stretch. Not a solitary light in sight. Oh, I'm wrong. There's a light now, but it must be a good half a mile away, and a bit off the road. I'll have to make for it. I hope it's from a farmhouse, though I haven't seen the sign of a farm for the last three hours. It's too mountainous about here I guess for a farm to be productive."

Ted pushed on, keeping the light in sight.

He was not riding, but leading the horse, as the animal went better that way.

The light continued to shine clear and distinct through the night, and Ted found no difficulty in keeping it in view.

That it came from some house, whose outlines the boy was not yet able to make out, was almost certain, and Ted welcomed any old shelter with pleasure, for the rain had begun falling in a kind of drizzle which promised to become heavier presently, while the wind was rising and souging through the many trees in the vicinity.

At length Ted came to a half opened gate leading into a short lane.

He took the liberty of entering it with his horse.

The fencing and general aspect of the place, as well as he could make out in the dark, did not impress him with the worldly importance of the person or persons who lived there.

"I don't believe I'll find much of an accommodation here," he mused; "but any kind of a roof is better than no shelter at all on such a night as this. It's going to rain pretty hard before a great while, and if I were obliged to push on to Sedgwick I should resemble a drowned rat by the time I got there. Who would have thought when I left Carson this morning that I should run into such conditions as these? It looked then as if it wasn't going to rain for a month. However, that wouldn't have made any difference with me if my horse hadn't met with that accident. We should both be snugly housed in Sedgwick by this time. Well, a fellow must take things as they come in this world and say nothing."

The light vanished as Ted continued on up the lane, but a dark blot upon the gloomy landscape indicated the position of the house he had been counting on.

The lane ended at a tumble-down gate, and pushing this open on its rusty hinges, boy and horse found themselves in a yard overgrown with weeds and other kinds of rank vegetation.

Had it been lighter Ted would have seen a weather-beaten two-story building that showed every evidence of neglect and comparative poverty.

In the darkness and rain, however, most of its shortcomings were temporarily concealed from the young visitor, who was not curiously enough disposed to examine the house with a critical eye.

Ted walked up to a door in a single-story addition at the rear, where he saw a light and which was evidently the kitchen, for a stovepipe rose through the roof, and knocked loudly.

CHAPTER XII.

A STARTLING ENCOUNTER.

Ted had to knock a second time before any notice was taken of his presence.

Then the light disappeared from the window, the door was unbarred and opened on a chain, and the outlines of a gaunt-looking woman of middle age, with a lamp in her hand, appeared in the narrow space.

"Who are you and what do you want?" she inquired in a tone that did not speak well for a hospitable reception.

"I am a boy, and I want shelter from the rain. I am on my way to Sedgwick."

"Why don't you go on to Sedgwick, then?"

"I'm afraid it's too far."

"It ain't more'n seven mile by the road."

"My horse has broken down, and as it's raining harder every moment I'd rather stay here awhile if you'll let me. If you'll give me a bed and something to eat, with shelter and some hay for my animal, I'll pay you well."

"What will you pay?" asked the woman, her eyes lighting up greedily at the word.

"I'll give you a dollar, if you think that's fair," replied Ted.

"A dollar!" exclaimed the woman.

"Yes, a dollar."

"I haven't any accommodations for strangers in the house," she answered, after a pause, during which she eyed the boy closely under the gleam of the lamp. "Besides, my husband wouldn't stand for you bein' here nohow. I expect him home any moment, maybe drunk, and he'd break my bones if he caught sight of you. Still, I want that dollar mighty bad. I don't see money very often, and a dollar would be a windfall to me. If you wouldn't mind puttin' up with the hay in the loft of the barn—you could put your horse in one of the vacant stalls—and some meat and bread with a jug of milk, and will pay me a dollar for it, you kin stop; but I can't do no better."

"All right," replied Ted, who was glad to make any kind of an arrangement that offered shelter from the inclemency of the weather. "The barn will do all right."

"It ain't much of a place," said the woman, in an apologetic tone, "but it'll keep off the wind and rain. You'll find plenty of hay for a bed in the loft, and you kin give your hoss as much of it as he kin eat. You'll find a bucket somewhere on the ground floor. You kin fill it with water from the trough in the yard. I'll let you have a lantern if you'll promise to be careful with it, and fetch it back as soon as you've fixed your hoss. Then you kin give me the dollar, and I'll give you the food and the jug of milk."

Ted told her that was satisfactory, so she got the lantern, lit it and handed it to him.

"You'll find the barn yonder," she said, waving her hand in the direction.

"Thank you, ma'am, I'll find it."

He found the building easily enough, and it was truly a dilapidated structure.

Ted wondered if it really would keep the rain out.

The door was held shut by a leather strap attached to a button.

The boy walked in first and looked around the ground floor.

He saw two stalls, in one of which was a fodder rack.

A rickety buggy stood at one side, held together by ropes, each of the wheels leaning in a different direction.

Pieces of harness hung about, but there was no sign of a horse.

Various farming implements, much the worse for use, lay around in disorder.

Ted went up the flight of stairs he saw in the corner and examined the loft.

There was a pile of hay there that would make a soft enough bed; a covered oblong box, which might or might not have been empty, and various odds and ends connected with farming.

Ted pitched as much hay down as he thought would satisfy the appetite of his animal, descended, put it in the rack, and then led the animal into the stall.

The horse attacked the hay, and while he was thus employed Ted hunted up the bucket and filled it at the trough.

After the animal had ate his fill the boy watered him, and then returned to the house with the lantern.

The woman had the food waiting for him, and after handing her the dollar bill, which she clutched as though it were a yellowback, he took the plate of meat and buttered bread, and the jug of milk, and retired to the barn to make away with it.

He shut the barn door, but could not fasten it on the inside.

Carrying the jug and the plate up to the loft, he sat down on the floor in the dark and disposed of the meat and bread and milk with a good appetite.

The rain, which had stopped after his conversation with the woman, now came down in earnest, while the wind piped up and whistled through the crannies of the barn.

"Gee! But I'm glad I'm under cover. It's a beastly night to be out in. The rain doesn't seem to come in through the roof, that's one satisfaction. As for the wind, I don't mind that, for the weather is warm. If it was winter I'd have to burrow under the hay to avoid being frozen. Well, I'll turn in now, hoping that there may be a change for the better by morning so that I can go on to Sedgwick."

Ted threw himself upon the pile of hay, and was presently lulled to repose by the wind and rain.

A couple of hours passed, and then there was a noise outside.

Two men were crossing the yard toward the barn.

Both were of powerful physique, and hard-looking chaps.

The one who led the way carried a lantern in his hand, and it was the same lantern Ted had used to attend on his horse.

The rain had stopped to some extent, but the flashing light showed that it was still coming down in a heavy drizzle.

The men were pretty well soaked, but neither seemed to mind it much.

The man with the lantern opened the barn door and walked in, followed by his companion.

As neither glanced in the direction of the stalls the horse escaped their attention.

"Look out that you don't stumble over that there plow, Tug," said the man who appeared to be the owner of the barn.

"I'll look out, don't you fear," replied his companion, none other than Tug Ralston, who had escaped, with a couple of other prisoners, from the county jail early that morning. "You think this place will be safe for me to lie low in for awhile?"

"It will be safe enough for to-night, I guess. In the mornin' I'll take you to a place in the woods where you'll be all right as long as you choose to stay there."

"I reckon I struck luck when I met you, Higgins," said Ralston as he followed the man up the stairs to the loft. "It must be nigh on to two years since we was pals."

"It's all of that, Tug, and I'm right glad to meet you again."

"You're doin' me a good turn, Higgins, and I sha'n't forget it."

"I never go back on an old friend if I can help it."

The two men were now in the loft and Higgins flashed his lantern carelessly around.

The light revealed to him the outlines of the sleeping boy on the hay.

"What in thunder have we here?" he ejaculated with an imprecation.

He stepped quickly over to the spot and turned the lantern full upon Ted, who was sleeping with his head buried in the hay.

"A boy" he said. "I wonder if he came in here on his own hook or whether my missus gave him permission to sleep here?"

"Is she that soft-hearted?" asked Ralston with a sour look.

"Not to my knowledge she isn't. I'll have to rout him out or it won't be safe for you to stay here."

"If you rout him out he'll see me, anyway."

"Not if you hide yourself while I'm doin' it."

"Where will I hide?"

"Get into that corner."

Ralston did so.

Then Higgins grabbed Ted by the arm and pulled him into a sitting posture.

"What are you doin' here, young feller?" he asked the boy in a fierce tone.

Ted looked at him in sleepy bewilderment.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I asked you what brought you here?" demanded Higgins crustily.

"Are you the man who owns this place?"

"Yes, I'm the man who owns this place. You ain't got no right here, so just skip."

"Won't you let me stay till morning?"

"No, I won't. I won't have you 'round here."

"I came here to get out of the rain, and I paid——"

Ted stopped as it suddenly occurred to him that the woman of the house might not want this man, who was probably her husband, to know that she had received a dollar for food and the poor accommodation of the loft.

"What's that? You paid what?"

"Nothing," replied the boy, who would rather lose the benefit of his money than get the woman in trouble. "I was bound for Sedgwick. My horse sprained one of his forelegs and couldn't carry me. Then it got dark and came on to rain. So I put in here to rest the horse and keep dry."

"Where's your hoss?"

"Downstairs in one of the stalls."

"I didn't see him. Well, you'd better take him and go. You can reach Sedgwick in an hour hossback."

"I'm afraid the horse won't bear me, so I'll have to walk."

"I don't care what you do as long as you get a move on."

"I'll give you half a dollar if you'll let me stay till morning."

"No, you won't give me nothin'. Just make yourself scarce, d'ye understand?"

Ted realized that further argument was useless, and he got up from his straw bed.

Higgins raised his lantern and flashed it in his face.

As the boy's features were plainly illuminated Tug Ralston uttered an exclamation of surprise and anger.

Ted turned and looked in the direction of the sound.

Ralston dashed forth from his place of concealment and grabbed the boy by the back of the neck.

"I've got you again, have I? Well, I reckon I'll fix you for keeps now, blast you!"

He drew a revolver from his pocket, cocked it and pressed it against Ted's head.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW HIGGINS SAVES TED'S LIFE AND THE BOY RETURNS THE FAVOR.

"Hold on, Tug!" exclaimed Higgins. "What in thunder are you up to?"

He knocked up his companion's arm just as the rascal pulled the trigger.

There was a flash, a stunning report that staggered Ted, and the bullet went into the roof of the barn.

"Are you mad, Tug Ralston?" roared Higgins, grabbing the revolver and wrenching it from his companion's hand.

"What in creation did you try to shoot this boy for?"

"Cause I hate him!" replied Ralston vindictively.

"You hate him!" cried Higgins in surprise.

"Yes, I hate him. Give me the gun so I can finish him."

"Do you mean to say that you know this boy?"

"Yes, I know him, and I'll never rest till he's planted."

"What have you got against him?"

"That's my business. I had him twice dead to rights, but each time he got away. He sha'n't get away now if I have to strangle him."

He spoke with compressed fury and made a grab for Ted. Higgins, however, interfered.

"Stop!" he said in a determined voice. "I won't stand for no murder business on my premises. Do you s'pose I want to have a noose put 'round my neck on your account?"

"Then leave the boy with me and get back to your house. You needn't know what happens after you're gone."

"I tell you I won't have nothin' like that 'round here," replied Higgins firmly, thrusting the revolver into his pocket.

"Well, if you don't like bloodshed I can wring his neck just as well as not. I don't care how I fix him as long as I do it," said Ralston sullenly.

"No, you let the boy alone."

"I thought you was a friend of mine," growled Tug.

"I'm doin' you a friendly turn in savin' you from the gallows."

"I ain't worryin' about the gallows."

"You'd get there pretty quick if you killed this boy."

"How do you know I would? I'm willin' to take the chances to get square with him."

"What the dickens has he done to you that you're so dead set against him?"

"He's done enough."

"It's my opinion that you're a bit off your block."

"I don't care what your opinion is. I'm goin' to settle things with this boy whether you like it or not."

"I say you're not. Skip along, young fellow, while you've got the chance."

Ted, seeing his opportunity, moved toward the ladder.

With a howl of rage Tug started for him, but Higgins interposed his bulky form between.

In a moment the two men grappled.

Both were of about equal strength and physique, and they swayed to and fro about the loft.

As Ted had no interest in their encounter, though he felt grateful to Higgins for saving his life, he rushed downstairs, unhitched his horse and led him out into the night.

The rain had ceased, but there was no sign that the weather was clearing up.

As Ted passed through the barn door he heard a crash up in the loft, and saw a flash of light through the small, sashless opening.

He hastened to lead his limping animal away, and had got as far as the gate of the lane when, looking back, he saw the loft was on fire.

"Well, it's nothing to me," he muttered, leading his horse into the lane. "Still, I wouldn't like to see any harm come to that man who saved me from having my brains blown out. I'll wait here a few moments."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before he saw one of the men dash out through the door and run towards the woods.

"That must be Ralston. The man who owned the place would not run away like that."

He watched to see Higgins appear, but he didn't, and the fire was increasing fast.

"I shouldn't wonder if Ralston knocked him senseless and then left him behind to burn up. He's coward and cur enough to do just such a thing. I'm going back to help the man myself. I owe him a good turn, and will pay it if I can."

Ted, after hastily tying his horse to a big spreading tree, ran back to the barn, which was blazing away at a great rate.

The smoke was pouring out of the window, which was outlined against the glare of the flames, and was rising through the interstices of the shingle roof.

Very little was coming through the doorway, and through that entrance Ted rushed.

It looked like a risky matter to venture up the ladder to the loft, but the boy, feeling that a life was at stake, was not deterred by the danger.

He bounded up two steps at a time and thrust his head into the thick smoke that filled the upper story.

Almost within his reach lay the unconscious form of the owner of the place, stretched at full length.

Ted stepped up and grabbed him by the head and shoulders.

He was a heavy weight to move, especially under the circumstances.

At that moment he heard the screams of the woman of the house, who had just discovered that the barn was on fire.

Whether she had any knowledge that her husband had gone to the building with the stranger he had brought with him, or whether she was merely concerned about the safety of the boy she had sent there to sleep, certain it is she ran toward the barn in great excitement.

She reached the door just in time to see Ted dragging her insensible husband down the stairs as he might a bag of goods.

With a shriek the woman rushed forward to help him.

As she caught her husband in her sinewy arms the boy staggered against the plow and fell over it.

Then the floodgates of heaven opened of a sudden and a heavy downpour of rain descended upon the landscape.

Under this deluge the fire began to hiss and splutter where it had broken through the roof.

Through it all the woman bore her husband to the house, and, unmindful of the boy who had really saved him, started to bring him to his senses.

This was not a difficult job, and he was soon on his feet, looking out the door at the barn where the fire was making little headway in the pouring rain.

The woman hurriedly told him how the boy, to whom she now admitted having given permission to stay all night in the loft, had pulled him downstairs from the burning loft, but she had not seen him since.

"He probably went off in the rain," she concluded.

"He needn't have done that now," growled the man. "As he did me a good turn I'd have let him stay in the kitchen for the rest of the night."

Seeing that while the rain continued there was a chance to save the lower part of his barn, at any rate, Higgins left the house and ran over to the building.

As he picked up the bucket that Ted had used to water his horse he saw the boy getting up from the plow on which he had been lying, knocked out.

"Hey!" cried Higgins. "You here yet? Run to the house and ask the old woman to give you a tin pail. I want you to help me put out the fire."

Ted got the pail and he and Higgins worked vigorously for the next fifteen minutes carrying water from the trough up to the loft and throwing it upon the burning hay and smoldering wood.

At the end of that time the flames had been entirely subdued.

Now that the need of further exertion was over Higgins turned to Ted and said:

"My old woman says you saved my life when I was un-

conscious in the burnin' loft above. Well, I'm obliged to you. If I can ever do as much for you I'll do it."

"You've already done as much for me. You saved me from having my brains blown out by Tug."

"That's so. I forgot about it. In fact, you were the cause of the racket between us which ended by his laying me out as stiff as a poker. He's got a fist that has as much power in it as a mule's hind legs."

While they were talking the rain eased up again to a smart drizzle, but that made little difference to them, as they were as wet as though they had been in the nearby river.

"Where did you leave your hoss?" asked Higgins.

"Under a big tree in the lane."

"You'd better go and bring him back. You can stay in the house for the rest of the night. The old woman shall make you a shakedown in the kitchen, and build a good fire to dry your clothes and mine."

"I'm much obliged to you."

"You're welcome. By the way, what is this grudge that Tug has against you?"

Ted told him about the incident in the mine which had led to Ralston's animosity.

"So he's been workin' in the Lookout mine, has he? I never knew that before. Well, I didn't think he was such a tough chap as he seems to be. He and me used to be pals once, about two years ago. Then he disappeared all of a sudden and I didn't see him again till to-night, when he came into the saloon at the Corners and asked for a drink. He seemed kind of nervous like, and when I went up and slapped him on the shoulder he jumped as though he had been shot, and put his hand to his hip pocket where he carried his gun. When he recognized me he called me outside and asked me to hide him up here, as he said he had broken jail that mornin'. I was willin' to do him a favor for old time's sake, so I fetched him on here. I was goin' to let him sleep in the loft, not supposin' it was occupied by somebody else. I would have let you stayed only I wanted you out on his account. If he hadn't jumped on you the way he did there wouldn't have been all this trouble, and you'd have been on your way to Sedgwick."

Ted brought his horse back to the barn, gave him a rubbing down with the help of Higgins, and then accompanied the man to the house, where a bed was prepared for him on the kitchen floor, and his clothes with Higgins's were hung to dry before a roaring fire.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FIENDISH SCHEME OF RALSTON'S.

Next morning he was awakened by hearing the woman moving around the kitchen.

She was preparing breakfast.

When she saw that he was awake she pointed to his clothes, which were on a chair, and said she'd go out while he dressed himself.

It didn't take Ted more than five minutes to get into his garments.

"There's a bucket of water, a towel and some soap outside," the woman said.

Ted accordingly went out into the yard and made his toilet as best he could.

By that time breakfast was ready, and he was invited by Higgins to sit down and eat with them, which he was glad to do.

When the meal was concluded he announced his intention of resuming his journey.

He bade good-bye to the man and his wife and started off, his horse seeming to have recovered from his lameness.

He had covered perhaps one mile when a man jumped out from the cover of some bushes and confronted him.

Ted had no difficulty in recognizing him as Tug Ralston.

The fellow grabbed the bridle of his horse and then seized the boy by the arm.

"I s'pose you thought you wouldn't see me again," said Ralston grimly; "but I ain't so easily shook off. I'm sorry that I ain't got no weapon with me, but I reckon I can fix you without one."

Ted was unarmed, having left his revolver with Jesse.

He had not the slightest idea of meeting Ralston when he left Carson, as he supposed the rascal was securely housed in the county jail.

Therefore he was placed at a great disadvantage in the presence of the husky scoundrel.

Ralston yanked him off his saddle, and held him while he bound his wrists behind his back.

"Now walk ahead of me or I'll smash your head in with a stone."

Ted, much against his inclination, felt obliged to comply with the fellow's orders.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't let up on a fellow after all the trouble you've given me," he said.

"I'll never let up on you till I've finished you," replied Ralston savagely.

Tug, leading the horse by the bridle, marched the boy ahead of him, up a path away from the road and into the mountains.

The rascal had nothing to say, and Ted was in no mood for conversation.

It was a fine sunshiny morning after the rain, and nature seemed to be in a chipper mood, as far as she could be in such a desolate region.

Ted wondered where his enemy was taking him, but he knew that it was useless for him to question the man on the subject.

After a walk that lasted perhaps an hour they came to a swift mountain stream.

The banks were rocky and without verdure of any kind.

Here Ralston stopped and tied the horse to a nearby tree.

"Sit down!" he roared at Ted.

The boy did so, for he judged the order would have been followed by a blow from the rascal's sledge-hammer fist had he refused to obey.

Tug paid no further attention to him, but went nosing around among the boulders as if in search of something.

Whatever it was the rascal was after, he did not find it, and he looked disappointed.

Finally he took out his pipe, filled it with tobacco, lit it and began to smoke, regarding the boy with a malignant look.

"I s'pose you're achin' to know what I'm goin' to do with you," he said at length.

"I can imagine that it isn't anything good," replied Ted wearily.

"You'll find out by and by when the sun gets a bit hotter," snarled Ralston with an expression of sinister satisfaction.

"Look here, Ralston, can't I buy you off for a good sum of money?" asked the boy after a pause. "I'll also agree not to appear against you in court."

"I'll guarantee you won't appear against me in court, if I ever get there, whether it suits you or not," he replied significantly. "As to buyin' me off, you ain't got money enough to do that."

"I'll have plenty of money in a short time if you let me go."

"Where are you goin' to get it?"

"Out of the copper mine on my property."

"On your property?" sneered Ralston.

"Yes. That is my property where you ran across Jesse Dane and me that Sunday you first tried to shoot me."

"Your property, eh? Did you think you can stuff me with such a story as that?"

"I'm telling you the truth," replied Ted, earnestly.

"If that's your property, and there's a copper mine on it, why were you workin' like a nigger with the rest of us in the Lookout? Answer me that."

"I didn't know that there was copper on my land till recently. I worked in the Lookout mine to get a general knowledge of copper so that I could prospect my property and see if there was copper on it."

"That was the reason, eh?" said Ralston incredulously.

"Yes."

"And you expect me to believe that tommyrot?" jeered the rascal.

"I haven't any reason for telling you what isn't so."

"Yes, you have. You want to try and hoodwink me into lettin' you off. But it won't work, not for a red cent," and the ruffian laughed sardonically.

"That isn't so. I want to convince you that I'm worth a lot of money, and that I'm able to pay you a good price for lettin' up on me."

"How much do you want to pay me?"

"I'll give you the first \$10,000 I'll get hold of."

"If I knew you had the money in good coin or notes at this moment I might talk business, but as you haven't I'm not goin' to take any chances."

"You won't be taking any chances. I'll give you my word that I'll pay you inside of six months."

"Your word ain't worth nothin' to me. You'd swear to any lie in order to give me the slip."

"If you take my life it won't benefit you the least bit," persisted Ted in desperate earnestness; "but you could get a whole lot of satisfaction out of \$10,000."

"I know I could if I had it; but as I haven't I'll take a whole lot of satisfaction out of doin' you up."

"And you want to kill me just because I gave you one smack in the eye down in the mine that evening."

"I don't allow nobody to get the best of me if I can help it. It wasn't the blow you gave me alone. You made me tumble out of the cage, and I came within an ace of passin' in my checks."

"That was your own fault."

"That's a lie! It was yours," replied Ralston savagely.

"Well, even if it was, you wasn't hurt much. You were around Carson drinking that night."

"That's because I was lucky. I swore then I'd have your life, and I'm goin' to have it, so you might as well close your trap. All you can say won't alter my intentions a bit."

Ted looked at his relentless face and felt discouraged.

The rascal had brought him there to kill him and could not be turned from his purpose.

Just why he was delaying the commission of his crime Ted could not understand, but he wasn't kept long in ignorance.

Ralston could have knocked his brains out with a stone and pitched his body in the stream, but he made no such attempt.

He had hit on a more malignant mode of accomplishing his object—a mode that could have occurred only to such a hardened ruffian.

Ralston cut off part of the hitching-rope attached to the horse.

With this he now proceeded to bind Ted's ankles together.

Then he pushed the boy back on the flat stone just above the water on which he had been seated.

"Lie there," he said with an evil grin. "You'll have company presently. Then you'll understand how you've got to die. I sha'n't have to spill your blood this time. In fact, there won't be no blood lettin' at all. The inhabitants of these rocks will take the job off my hands."

"What do you mean?" asked Ted, not understanding what was in store for him.

"What do I mean?" replied Ralston with a fiendish grin. "I mean that I can count five rattlers comin' out of their holes at this moment. They've been waitin' for the sun to warm things up, and now they're comin' out to look around. They're not very lively yet, but I mean to stir them up. When they get their mad up and look around to see who's the cause of it they'll see you. Then the moment they get within strikin' distance of you they'll wait for you to make the first move, and when you do there'll be somethin' doin' quicker'n a flash of lightnin'. A rattler can strike so quick it would make your head swim to follow the movement. The moment the p'ison is in you it'll work through your veins so fast that a whole drug-store couldn't save you if it was standin' yonder. How do you like the prospect?"

It is scarcely necessary to say that Ted didn't like it.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH RALSTON GETS IT IN THE NECK.

As Tug Ralston spoke he gathered up a handful of small stones and began casting them at the slowly moving reptiles.

The rattlesnakes, the most deadly species of the wilderness, began to take notice.

Whir-r-r!

The warning rattle of one of the snakes sounded sharp and distinct above the swishing waters of the stream.

The rascal threw more stones at them.

Whir-r-r! Whir-r-r!

The rattlers were throwing off their torpidity.

They began coiling up ready to dart their heads, or even their entire sinuous folds, at the enemy they scented somewhere about.

Tug laughed discordantly as he noticed the effect he had produced among them.

"They will soon have you, Ted Brown," he gritted. "Lie

still there! Don't you dare get up or I'll make a target of your head, too."

Whir-r-r!

One of the snakes sprung his rattle seemingly so close to Ted that the lad, with a cry of fear, turned over to roll as far away as possible.

The snake was not quite within striking distance of the spot where the boy lay, but it saw him move and rapidly uncoiled to glide nearer.

"Stop!" roared Ralston, springing forward, for he saw that another move would precipitate Ted into the stream and rob him of the special entertainment he had counted on.

As the boy made the move in his terror of the rattlesnake, Tug reached for and grabbed him just as he was falling.

To brace himself he grasped the edge of the rock nearest the snake.

In a moment the snake stopped, coiled itself and arched its glittering head.

Its keen, beady eyes were centered on Ralston's hand.

"You thought to escape the snakes, did you?" gritted the man. "Rather drown, eh? Well, I don't blame you, but I was too quick for you that time. Come back here and take your medicine. I wouldn't miss seein' you squirm among them snakes for a mint. What a circus it will——"

The sentence ended in a hoarse cry.

Just as he pulled Ted back on the stone he raised his fingers from the rock.

That movement was what the rattler had been waiting for.

With the quickness of light its head shot forward and its fangs were buried deep in Ralston's hand.

The man let go of Ted and turned around with the cry on his lips.

He saw the rattler and realized that he had fallen into the pit he had dug for the boy.

His face went ashen white with terror and despair.

Another rattler was close upon him, too.

While he was engaged with Ted they had singled him out as their enemy and came toward him.

The whir-r-r sounded and the fangs of the second snake were buried in the fleshy part of his thigh.

His unearthly scream startled Ted into a sitting posture.

The exertion of the act loosened the cord that bound his wrists so much that one of his hands came out and both were then free.

The proximity of four of the rattlers caused Ted to get his jackknife out of his pocket in a twinkling and cut the rope that bound his ankles.

Then he sprang on the rock and looked around to see how he could best evade the snakes.

Their attention was all turned on Ralston, who had fallen and was writhing on the ground.

Ted gazed in a fascinated way at the doomed rascal.

He saw two snakes strike him simultaneously—one in the cheek and the other in the neck.

One minute later the scoundrel stiffened out and lay still, quite dead, his heart paralyzed by the quantity of deadly poison that had been injected into his veins.

He had met the very fate he had designed for his victim, and the horror of it was such that Ted never forgot that scene as long as he lived.

As soon as the boy recovered his faculties he made haste to leave the vicinity.

The man who had made so many attempts to kill him was now a corpse—a corpse that even the mountain vultures and coyotes would shun.

In an hour his body would be black and bloated—an object of repulsion.

The old adage that the mills of the gods grind slowly but exceedingly fine was demonstrated in his fate.

He had been allowed to go his limit and had compassed his own death.

Ted untied his horse from the tree and started back, as near as he could guess, for the road leading to Sedgwick.

It took him two hours to reach it, and another hour to cover the distance to the town.

As soon as he got there he inquired for the deputy sheriff.

He learned that he was away with a small posse trying to round Tug Ralston up.

Then the boy told the constable how Ralston had met his death.

The news was immediately telegraphed to Truxton, the county-seat.

Ted registered at a hotel for dinner, and after the meal started for Truxton at a smart gait.

He arrived there too late to connect with the afternoon train, so he put up at the nearest hotel to the railroad station, and put in his time that evening writing a long letter to Tess Cooke, in which he detailed all his thrilling experiences since leaving Carson.

He wound up by describing Ralston's terrible death and his own wonderful escape from a like fate.

He also wrote a letter to Jesse describing what he had passed through, but in a much briefer way, referring him to Tess for the fuller details.

Next morning he took the east-bound train, and in due time arrived at Petersville and was welcomed with open arms by his happy mother.

She hardly knew him, she declared on greeting him at the station, for he had changed quite a bit from the country lad who had gone West merely to look up his property.

He was bigger and stronger, and more manly looking.

The hard work of the mine and the perils through which he had passed in connection with Tug Ralston had left their impress on him in more ways than one.

He had a long talk with his mother about the land and the copper it contained, specimens of which he had brought with him.

At her suggestion they both called on Judge Harper, a retired lawyer living in the village, who was a sort of friend of the family, and Ted laid the project of forming a company to mine the copper before him.

Ted showed him the specimens, and the written report of old man Cooke.

The evidence produced by the boy was sufficient to cause him to take a lively interest in the matter.

He communicated with an expert mining man in Truxton, requesting him to go to the Brown property, and to call on Mr. Cooke for full details.

The result was a report so perfectly satisfactory that Judge Harper no longer had any doubts as to the advisability of helping Ted form a company for getting the ore on the market.

Full particulars were obtained from the expert as to the cost of establishing and operating a suitable plant, the cost and method of shipping the ore.

With complete data at his command the judge went ahead and interested capitalists in the scheme, and in due time the Montana Copper Mining Company was incorporated under the laws of the State of Montana, with the chief office at Truxton.

The Brown property was turned over to the company, and Ted was elected president.

Old man Cooke was given some shares and made resident manager of the mine, a post he was thoroughly competent to fill.

A working capital was raised, machinery purchased, buildings erected, and operations on the mine begun.

Judge Harper, who had taken a big block of the stock, was made vice-president, but it was understood that for the present he was to attend to all the duties of the president, which his business experience qualified him for, while Ted went to the site of the mine and acted as assistant to Tess's father in order to thoroughly inform himself about all the details of copper mining.

Jesse resigned his job with the Lookout Company and got a much better position under Ted, together with a considerable amount of the stock of the new company.

Tess was thoroughly happy once more because Ted was back where she could see him several times a week.

The death of Tug Ralston had been a big relief to her, for the rascal's persistency in following up Ted had kept her continually on the anxious seat.

Thus several months passed away and the Montana Copper Mining Company began to attract attention in the commercial world as a promising producer of an ore that was much needed in electrical and other industries.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH TESS COOKE SHOWS THE STUFF SHE'S MADE OF.

"Say, Ted," said Jesse one morning, walking into the office of the Montana mine in one of the buildings on the property, "matters have come to a focus at last at the Lookout."

"What do you mean?" asked the young president of the Montana Company.

"There's a strike on at the Lookout."

"A strike!" ejaculated Ted.

"Yes. For higher wages and shorter hours. You know this thing has been on the hooks for some time."

"I know it has; but I didn't think it would come to a head so soon."

"Well, it has. The Lookout is tied up completely."

That wasn't pleasant news for Ted to hear.

The same hours and the same pay were in force at his mine, and the dissatisfaction of the miners at the Lookout was liable to spread to the Montana.

This state of things was not entirely unexpected.

The miners in the district had been pulling wires for shorter hours and increased pay for some time.

They had held meetings on the subject, where speeches arguing in favor of better conditions from the men's standpoint had been made, and the majority of the miners were clearly in favor of bringing the matter to an issue.

Committees had waited on the superintendents of both mines requesting that the change the men wanted be made.

The mining companies were not in favor of granting the demands of their workers, and through their superintendents had given them to understand that fact.

Their ultimatum was sullenly received by the men, who proceeded to hold more meetings in order to decide what they should do about it.

A secret meeting had been held by the committee working in the men's interests on the preceding Sunday.

What had transpired at that meeting was not generally known.

As a matter of fact a last appeal to the mine owners had been decided on, failure of which was to culminate in a strike at both mines.

The committee first waited on the superintendent of the Lookout.

The spokesman delivered the men's ultimatum, giving the official forty-eight hours to communicate with the officers of the company at Truxton.

Then the committee called at the Montana mine.

Ted met the delegation.

The spokesman asked for old man Cooke and was told that the superintendent had gone to Truxton and would not be back for three days.

Instead of laying their ultimatum before Ted, the committee retired.

The young president, being a boy, was not recognized by the committee as of sufficient importance to confer with.

The men decided to wait till Cooke returned.

On the morning with which this chapter opens the forty-eight hours allowed the Lookout people expired, and the committee called on the superintendent of the mine for their answer.

The superintendent told the men that the president of the company being away at New York, nothing could be done until he returned.

This answer was not considered satisfactory.

The order was immediately given to strike, and every worker in the mine quit at once.

Jesse Dane was talking to the Lookout's superintendent when this happened, and he hastened back to tell Ted.

"Then we may look for trouble here," said the young president.

"I'm afraid so. You said nothing to me about getting an ultimatum from that committee that was here Monday noon."

"They didn't give me any ultimatum or anything else. They asked to see Mr. Cooke, and when I told them he was away at Truxton and would not be back until to-day or to-morrow, they said they would call again."

"Oh, I guess there'll be no strike here until the committee submits its ultimatum. There's little doubt but they'll do it, for we stand on the same footing with the Lookout people. It's a wonder that the committee didn't make their demand to you, for you're the president of the company, and the men know it."

"They said nothing to me one way or the other, though I asked the spokesman what business had brought the committee to the mine."

"You expect Mr. Cooke back to-day, don't you?"

"This afternoon or to-morrow morning."

"What are you going to do if the men threaten to strike unless their demands are complied with?"

"I'm in favor of a compromise. At this stage of the game we can't afford to grant everything the men want. It would hurt the company."

"A strike would hurt it, too, wouldn't it?"

"Yes; but of the two evils I'd rather stand the strike than surrender unconditionally. As soon as this company is well on its feet I shall advocate dividing our prosperity with our workers; but we can't do that at present. It is unreasonable for the men to expect as much from us as from the Lookout, which has been established for some years, and is making money."

"If the Lookout mine yielded to all demands we would have to do the same, whether we could afford it or not, or shut down indefinitely."

"That's true; but from what I know of the president and officers of the Lookout there is little danger of such a thing happening."

At that moment Tess Cooke appeared in the doorway.

"May I come in?" she asked smilingly.

"Sure thing. Why not?" asked Ted.

As soon as the girl entered the office Jesse said he had some business outside to attend to.

Fifteen minutes later he came rushing back in a state of great excitement.

"Ted," he cried, "a committee of Lookout strikers is outside. They have been down in the mine and about a third of our men have been induced to quit work."

"That so?" replied Ted. "That isn't a square deal. I must look into this."

He walked outside, followed by Tess and Jesse.

A crowd of demonstrative men was gathered near the mouth of the main shaft.

More were coming up from below as fast as the cage could bring them.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded Ted, walking up to the men.

"It means that we've quit until your company gives us what we want—more pay and less hours," replied a big chap in sulky defiance.

"You haven't submitted any final demand to that effect."

"Our committee was here on Monday, just the same."

"Your committee said nothing to me whatever."

"Oh, you're only a boy. You don't count," replied the fellow sneeringly.

"I guess you'll find that I count some," replied Ted resolutely. "I order you all to go back to work and then submit the matter to Mr. Cooke when he gets back from Truxton."

"You order us to go back to work!" answered the man wrathfully. "You've got a lot of nerve for a kid. Who do you think you're talkin' to?"

"I'm talking to you for one."

"D'ye hear that, fellers?" roared the man. "Are we goin' to put up with his sass?"

"No, no!" cried the others angrily, surrounding the boy. "Tumble him into the cage and send him down into the mine."

"We'll do better than that," shouted the ringleader. "We'll give him a free ride to the river in this here car."

Seize him, some of you. Hand me that rope yonder and we'll tie him in so that he can't get out."

In spite of his resistance Ted Brown was lifted into the car and tied there.

Then the angry copper miners proceeded to push the car away from the mouth of the shaft toward the incline leading to the river.

This ride that the dissatisfied and turbulent crowd of mine workers were bent on treating Ted to was no funny thing at all.

The steel ore car, in which the boy was speedily secured by the wrists to each end of the rope passed down under the center of the vehicle, ran on rails that reached from the mouth of the shaft down a long, though not very steep incline, to a small dock on the creek, or river, as some called it.

When filled with ore two men guided it down by means of a small chain, and after its contents were dumped into the lighter at the wharf they hauled it back up the incline to be refilled.

Several of these cars were continually passing up and down on the rails during working hours, but at present the output of ore from the mine had come to a stop, and the cars were idle.

If this particular car was sent over the edge of the incline with Ted in it and allowed to cover the distance to the wharf of its own accord, it was bound to accumulate unusual speed, enough, in fact, to bounce the car clear over the lighter into the creek.

In that case Ted, being unable to extricate himself from his bonds, would surely be drowned.

Whether the men thought of that or not, certain it is that they made no attempt to prevent the tragedy that was almost certain to take place.

Ted, however, was not destined to take that fatal ride.

As the car emerged from the crowd with its living burden, Jesse Dane sprang forward to his chum's aid.

As he laid his arm on the steel car to stay its progress he was seized by a couple of the miners and hurled back several yards.

Then, with shouts of satisfaction, mingled with jibes hurled at the helpless boy, the procession continued on.

Ted, however, had another defender—one who was prepared to give her life if need be to save him, but not before she had made things exceedingly sultry for the crowd about the car.

That defender was Tess Cooke.

Bounding forward like a fawn she placed herself, drawn revolver in hand, right before the moving car.

"Stop!" she cried imperiously. "Stop that car or I'll shoot, and if I miss one of you out of six you can tie me in the car, too."

The men stopped and looked at her in some confusion.

Everybody knew Tess Cooke, and they knew she held the lives of six men in her right hand.

They knew that she meant business, too, for the flash of her eye and the ring of her voice carried conviction to the beholders.

"Drop that car!" she cried. "Drop it this moment, or I'll lay every man of you out as stiff as a ramrod as sure as the sun is shining this moment."

The men at the car released their hold on it and fell back.

The ringleader, who was just behind, shouted furiously at them.

"Are you goin' to let a gal stop you?" he snarled.

"You push the car if you think it's safe to do it," growled one of the men in a sulky tone.

With an imprecation the leader started forward, put both hands on the car and was about to give it a powerful shove that would have sent it against the girl and thence over the brink on to the incline, when Tess fired.

The fellow uttered a terrible cry, put his hand to his chest and swung half around.

Then he dropped like a stone.

"Back, all of you!" cried Tess, darting up to the car, menacing the crowd with her smoking weapon. "Back, I say!"

The mob of miners stampeded in a moment.

Jesse, knife in hand, sprang into the car and cut Ted loose.

"I hope you didn't kill Gleason, Tess," said Ted as he bent over the unconscious ringleader.

"No, I didn't shoot to kill, but to give those men a lesson."

"You gave it to them, all right," said Ted.

Gleason was dangerously, but not fatally, hurt, and he recovered in time, but he never saw Tess Cooke after that but he kept her at a distance.

Accompanied by Tess and Jesse, Ted tackled the miners and got them to listen to reason.

The result was they returned to work again.

When Mr. Cooke returned he held an interview with the strike committee, explained to them the condition of the new company and offered them reduced hours at the same wages, promising, with Ted's sanction, to increase the pay later on.

The men accepted the compromise and all further trouble at the mine was averted.

The strike went on at the Lookout, and a company of State militia was sent to protect the company's property.

Eventually a compromise was agreed on similar to the one at the Montana mine.

Two years later Ted married Tess Cooke, took up his residence in Truxton, and his duties as president of the company.

The stock of the Montana Copper Company by that time had risen above par, and the boy, now a young man, was independently wealthy.

Thus, from an humble boy copper miner, Ted Brown had risen to riches.

THE END.

Read "TIPS OFF THE TAPE; OR, THE BOY WHO STARTLED WALL STREET," which will be the next number (146) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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GOOD STORIES.

The town of Cheshire, Mass., was known to fame for generations before Dalton had become a seat of statesmanship. It was settled by some of the dairy farmers of Cheshire, England, and for years its product was the most noted in the State, if not in the country. Mr. Dean delights to tell the story of the famous Cheshire cheese which was presented to Thomas Jefferson, and many a Congressman has added it to his store of knowledge. Cheshire was strongly Republican, or anti-Federalist, in early times, and upon the inauguration of Jefferson the Cheshire farmers decided that the product of one day's milking should be contributed by everybody, to be made into a cheese to be given to the President. On the day appointed all the people gathered in their best bib and tucker, the mysteries of cheesemaking were exemplified to their utmost, and the result, pressed into a huge cake in an immense cider press, was found to be a mammoth cheese weighing 1,600 pounds. Representative George P. Lawrence is wont to tell friends that when the cheese reached the vicinity of Baltimore it had grown so old that it walked the rest of the way, but Mr. Dean says this is not so, and as Mr. Dean still owns a part of the apparatus with which the historic cheese was made, his version still has the right of way.

Everybody is familiar with the big gray paper nests which wasps and hornets attach to trees and buildings during the summer. Nearly every boy has had some experience with stirring up the hornets. Late in summer there are from five hundred to fifteen hundred of these insects in a nest, and all of them are ready to battle for their home. In winter, however, you can take the nest down and examine its wonderful structure with perfect safety, for its belligerent builders have entirely deserted it. Where have they gone? The males and workers have scattered and died here and there on the last autumn flowers, but the queens have concealed themselves in their winter quarters. The large, bold faced hornets hide under logs, bark and eaves. The smaller wasps crawl into crevices of the buildings and rocks. A professor in a Western college last winter pried down the decayed rock of an overhanging cliff, and in the cracks of the loosely jointed rock he found thousands of wasps benumbed in their winter quarters. With the wasps were found numerous wood cockroaches and hundreds of their large, diamond-shaped egg cases. The cockroaches had been feeding on the helpless wasps and the immense number of the remains of both insects showed that they had resorted to these same cliffs for many years.

One of the prominent men of the Big Hole section who was in the city expressed the opinion that there were only a few wolves left in that country, but that the few made it mighty interesting for the stockmen. He says these wolves are very hard to trap, refuse to take poison, and that the most expert

hunter might try for weeks without getting within rifle shot of one. "There are not more than a dozen wolves in the whole watershed of the Big Hole River," said this gentleman. "And one of the best hunters in this country, Fred Francis, who is familiar with every nook and corner in the valley, is of the opinion there are not more than half a dozen. I am willing to admit, however, the few there are make life a burden for the stockmen and keep them in constant fear of a midnight raid on their animals. Wolves kill for the sport of killing and it is seldom an animal survives after being bitten by a wolf, the merest nip usually proving fatal. Only one wolf has been killed there in the last two months, and that one was trapped by Fred Francis. Its capture was purely a matter of luck. Every man in the Big Hole carried a rifle, whether on horseback or traveling with a team to trade at a store or attend church, in anticipation of getting an opportunity to kill a wolf and secure the big bounty offered for the scalps. Two of the prominent ranchmen and stockmen who reside near Chalk Bluffs have secured several hundred dollars in subscriptions from the ranchmen to pay a bounty of \$25 for each wolf scalp in addition to the bounty of \$10 paid by the State. It is said that not more than twenty wolves have been killed in the basin during the last six years, but in that time thousands of dollars' worth of stock has been destroyed by these pests. So far as known only one wolf has been poisoned in the Big Hole, and that was thirteen years ago. They are more wary and cunning than a fox and can smell a trap a mile away; they refuse to take poison, and as their depredations are committed in the early dawn or in the night it is seldom that one is seen, even by the most astute hunters. So all in all the wolf question is a difficult proposition to deal with."

JOKES AND JESTS.

The prince heard that great preparations were being made to entertain him at Newport. "I'm afraid they'll make a monkey of me," he commented.

She—Do you go to the opera much? He—Never. "But I understood your wife to say you were passionately fond of Italian productions." "So I am; I love macaroni."

He—Dearest, will you be mine? She—Oh, how sudden! Do give me a little time to think. He—I cannot wait another minute. I have a \$3-an-hour cab at the door.

"And you say he got rich selling meal tickets, ten for a dollar? How was such a thing possible?" "Oh, very simple. Nobody ever went back after the second meal."

Eastman—I understand your father owns a large ranch in New Mexico. Does he run it on scientific principles? Westlake—No; he runs it on money-making principles.

"Dat automobile done killed five chickens while it were goin' down de road," said Miss Miami Brown. "Yes," answered Mr. Erastus Pinkley, "but de fus' cost of de machine is too much to make de inves'tment profitable."

"Well, Johnny, my dear, how are you getting on with your French?" "Oh, very well, uncle. We translate quite nice, sensible sentences now, such as 'My uncle never allows my birthday to pass without giving me a present,' or 'It is certain that my uncle will give me something quite splendid this time.'"

Little Richard, who is five, and who has arrived at the dignity of first trousers, was disgusted when he saw a little neighbor, aged three, arrayed also for the first time in the garments of distinction, says the "Woman's Home Companion." "Now, just look what they've done to Wilson's baby!" he exclaimed. "They've gone and put it in pants before they know whether it's going to be a boy or a girl!"

A TRAGEDY IN HIGH LIFE

By Paul Braddon.

Mrs. Barstow had not been a well woman in several years, although there were no serious apprehensions regarding an unexpected death.

She had been ailing for a couple of days past rather more than usual, and Dr. Dennett stopped to see her about half-past seven, as he was on his way home, after making his last call.

The doctor had but just rung the bell when there reached his ears a shrill and piercing shriek.

Suspecting that something of a startling character had happened, he pounded on the door on hearing rushing footsteps go past without answering his summons.

The door was opened presently by a servant, who, at sight of him, exclaimed:

"Thank Heaven! You're the very person that's wanted!"

"What is the matter?"

"It's the missus, sir."

"Where is she?"

"In yon."

The girl nodded toward the parlor.

On entering this spacious and magnificently appointed apartment the doctor saw fair Florence Barstow with her mother's head resting on her lap.

The girl had been stroking her mother's face, and when first seen by the doctor was piteously importuning her to open her eyes.

Hat in hand, the doctor advanced.

Florence looked up, and on recognizing him gave him a pitiful, prayerful look, that went straight to the doctor's heart.

But a single glance at the face of Mrs. Barstow told him that his presence was of no avail. The lady was dead!

Hasty footsteps caused the doctor to turn his eyes slightly, just far enough to see who it was. George Barstow had entered. He was in full evening clothes, as though he had intended going to some festivity.

He advanced, and as he saw his mother lying there, with her head pillowed on Florence's lap, his hands clenched themselves in a fierce way. The doctor noticed the fact, for it appeared to him that there was nothing that should have drawn forth such a manifestation.

Doctor Dennett had never liked George Barstow, and, on the contrary, had never been liked by him.

They had ever avoided each other, never meeting face to face save by accident.

Somehow it had always seemed to the doctor that George was out of his place in a family like this. Dressed in fine clothing though he was, there was something essentially coarse and vulgar about him, which could not be said of Florence or the mother.

And Mr. Barstow, who had died a few years before, had been noted as a man of polish.

George Barstow was the first to speak.

"Is mother dead?" he hoarsely asked.

The doctor gravely bowed.

"No, no!" Florence cried, in anguished tones. "You do not—cannot mean that!"

"It is too true," the doctor kindly said. "You must try to bear bravely up under your sorrow, and please be kind enough to go to your own room."

Sobbing convulsively, Florence obeyed.

George hoarsely asked:

"Have you been expecting her to die, doctor?"

"For some time, of course."

"But within a short time?"

"No. Why?"

"Because it would have been an injustice to us to have kept us in ignorance had you expected such a sudden termination to her trouble."

The doctor was gazing curiously at George.

The latter now dropped into a chair and buried his face in his hands, giving way to deepest grief.

Doctor Dennett felt certain, however, that George's grief was not so great as to prevent him slyly viewing through his interlaced fingers every motion that he made.

When the doctor called in the housekeeper and asked for assistance to remove the body upstairs, George Barstow drew a deep breath of relief.

"She died a natural death, then, doctor?" he said.

"Yes. Had you reason to think otherwise?"

"Oh, no!—not at all! I didn't mean so much if she had died a natural death as if she had died from the complaint for which you were treating her. I have a horror of coroners and post mortems, and unless death was due to some cause known to yourself that would have to follow, wouldn't it?"

"Yes."

"You don't consider there's any need of it now?"

"Hardly."

It was clear that in this fact there was a source of infinite relief to George Barstow, more so than the circumstances would seem to warrant, as there was no need of his seeing the post mortem, had one been considered necessary.

The doctor went home, in a ruminative mood, about ten o'clock.

He had hardly reached his private apartment when there was a ring at the door-bell.

It brought an impatient exclamation to his lips, for he had no desire to go out again to-night. However, the servant showed in a man "to see him in the office."

The doctor faced his caller languidly, then sprang to his feet, and, extending his hand, exclaimed:

"The very man I was thinking about!"

"Is that so?"

"Yes. How's the detective business?"

"Flourishing. Crime never seems to die. It just grows and waxes stronger day by day."

"As I said, I was thinking about you. Something has just happened that has in it a suggestion that I don't like to entertain, but——"

"Let's hear it."

"You've heard of Mrs. Barstow?"

"Yes."

"She died early this evening."

"Well?"

"She had been ailing with a complaint that was liable to terminate fatally at any time, although her general health, outside of that, was so excellent that I didn't think it would happen."

"I am listening to you."

The doctor had hesitated, as though loth to voice what was in his mind.

In a half-apologetic tone he said:

"A post mortem may settle the whole thing honorably, and Heaven knows I hope it may. It seemed to me that her son did not act naturally under the circumstances."

"In what way did he not?"

The doctor went over the scene that had been enacted in the parlor and the questions put to him.

The detective listened with face growing grave.

When the other had finished he said:

"You will find your worst fears realized, doctor."

"Do you know anything?"

The doctor was on his feet at once.

"I do. I know that George Barstow is a miserable cur, a man who inherited all the worst traits of his depraved ancestry——"

"Hold on!—hold on! That is harsh to say of Mr. and Mrs. Barstow——"

"George Barstow was not their child," the detective interrupted.

The doctor had risen from his chair a minute before. He now dropped back in it as though he had received a shock.

"Is that so?" he said, when he could speak.

"It is. Ten years ago Mr. Barstow had his suspicions excited on that point, and sent for me. He gave me his fullest confidence, and explained that at the time when his first

child was born he was away from home. Little George was two months old when he reached home.

"Five or six years later, he said, he had encountered a woman on the street who claimed the child was hers. She was in a half-intoxicated condition, and he attributed it to a brain the worse for drink.

"Well, not to burden you with what he told me, I will say that I started in to trace up the life of the little one. I found who had been Mrs. Barstow's nurse. Later I found that the nurse had been permitted, through very careless management, as you, a doctor, can appreciate, to take the babe out before it was a week old. I tracked the nurse to the haunts she visited, and, by a liberal use of money, quickened the memories of a number of people who knew the nurse and had seen her there with Mrs. Barstow's child.

"I learned from thoroughly good sources that Mrs. Barstow's baby had been permitted to fall downstairs, breaking its neck. In this dilemma, a graceless creature offered the nurse her week-old child, and it was this babe that the nurse took back to the Barstow home.

"When I explained it all to Mr. Barstow I could see that he felt that he had cause for both joy and sorrow.

"There was sorrow to be felt, inasmuch as he now had no son, although I, who was not blinded, saw evil traits in the child then, and thought he really had cause for joy in that respect.

"The sense of joy that he experienced was in the fact that my investigations relieved his wife from all suspicion of having in any way deceived him. I know that some such thought bore more heavily on him than all the rest together.

"Believing that she loved the child as her own, Mr. Barstow extracted a pledge from me never to relate these circumstances save under certain conditions. His wife was never to learn of George's not being her child, saving in such manner as he might arrange.

"Whether Mrs. Barstow learned, or not, I cannot say, but I think it likely that she knew. In some way—direct or indirect—I think her learning the truth resulted in her death."

The doctor looked long and fixedly upon the detective.

"You think George murdered her?" he then inquired.

"I do not say that. She might have died from the shock of learning the truth. What was the appearance of her body? Was there a suggestion of poisoning?"

"No-o-o," slowly, hesitatingly.

"You are not very positive."

"I couldn't be, without a post mortem. There's but one poison that it could be, I think, and that is——"

"What?"

"It might be aconite."

Slowly the detective said:

"George Barstow bought half an ounce of aconite this afternoon!"

Again the doctor leaped to his feet.

He paced the floor a while, and then he hoarsely asked:

"What is best to be done?"

"We must go to the house at once. It was pure accident that told me of the purchase of aconite, and suspecting him capable of any crime, and knowing you were the family doctor, I called to tell you of it. But it would seem that the villain did not let the grass grow under his feet."

In George's room was found a half-ounce phial labeled aconite, of which more than a third was missing. The detective hesitated no longer, but put a pair of handcuffs on George's wrists.

Half an hour later some papers were discovered in Mrs. Barstow's room that gave the key to the crime.

Before his death Mr. Barstow had discovered that George was not the boy or man he should have been. In fact, he dreaded the worst for him. After his death Mrs. Barstow found a packet addressed to her, and on the exterior the words: "To be opened only when George may come home intoxicated, or be guilty of some action belittling his father's memory."

Occasion had come for Mrs. Barstow's opening the package. Whether she then for the first time learned that George was not her child, I have never had means of knowing.

George broke down immediately on finding himself a prisoner, and wept and begged and pleaded to be let go.

He made a clean breast of the crime.

Mrs. Barstow had again and again forgiven him for deeds that were a disgrace to himself and her, but instead of being touched by her generosity he abused her trust more and more.

He had forged her name to a check two days before, and then had told her of it, fearing that it would not be accepted at the bank, and begging that she would guarantee it as all right if the check were sent to her.

This she refused to do, and in firm, determined tones informed him that now the end had come. She would give him a week to obtain a position of some sort, and then she would proclaim to the world that he was not of her blood, that she was not to be reflected upon through his misdoings.

Counting on the fact of his not being her son being known to nobody else, he resolved to end her existence, and, in the absence of a will, share up the property with Florence.

The post mortem, held the following morning, revealed the fact that death was due to aconite, and George had admitted that it was administered by his hand.

Just before the time set for his trial, George went stark mad. Removed to an asylum, he there died in a padded cell, into which he had been placed to prevent his dashing his brains out.

Some college professors insist that the examination system is a failure and they can cite instances which they believe bear out their side of the case. One of these faculty men, a recent graduate from a large university, said: "When I was in college there was a man of great capacity who had neglected one course from his freshman year when he got a condition. When it came down to his senior year he had to make it up, but he let it go until the very last set of examinations. Then he had to get it off or lose his degree. This man knew so little of German, the course in which he was deficient, that he could not even read the printed words with ease, let alone understand them. But he passed the examination. He went to a man in his class who was proficient in German, armed with sets of examination papers in that course for about six years back. They picked out the recurrent questions until finally they saw that there were enough, which were included in the various papers of each year to insure a passing percentage. This man, who as I said was of great capacity, then proceeded to memorize a correct answer to each of these questions. He had a keyword for each question, so that he would recognize it even if it were not worded exactly as the one on a previous paper. With this sort of work, which took him about all night, he went into the examination and passed off a year's work triumphantly."

A singular passion for literally reveling in gold is exhibited now and then by men who have suddenly become rich. Some years ago a London journalist, who had speculated in railroad stocks, netted five thousand pounds as the result of a lucky venture. Drawing it in gold, the fortunate man repaired to a hotel, emptied the bags of gold in the bed, and went to sleep literally in the sands of Pactolus. The man was so crazed by his good fortune that he found indescribable pleasure in reveling in a golden bath. Paganini, the violinist, when he received the proceeds of his concerts (he insisted upon being paid in gold), used to wash his hands in sovereigns. A French novelist, Soulié, wrote a book entitled "The Memoirs of the Devil." It took; the publishers paid him for the first volume ten thousand dollars in gold. The author carried the gold to his bedroom, poured it into a foot bath, and enjoyed for half an hour the excitement of moving his feet to and fro in a bath of gold coins, smoking, meanwhile, the biggest of Havanas. A Boston merchant of great wealth, believing certain symptoms indicated that he would become insane, consulted a specialist, and under his advice became an inmate of a private asylum. For twelve years there his recreation was piling up gold coins and then knocking them over. At times he washed his hands in gold eagles and half-eagles. At the end of the long seclusion he returned to his counting room, and in twelve months confirmed the thoroughness of his recovery by amassing five hundred thousand dollars.

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